University of Alberta

Transformational Learning and Educational Reform Through Critical Reflection:

The Promise of Dialogue

by

Robert Guy Garneau

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Secondary Education

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the people whose patience, faith, and inspiration made its successful completion possible. First of all I extend my gratitude to Dr. David G. Smith and Dr. Sue M. Scott, my co-supervisors, who mentored me through this challenging process, for their wisdom and whose advice challenged my thinking when I needed it most. I acknowledge the contribution of Dr. David Blades, who turned me into a philosopher and initiated my own transformational learning. My wife, Joyce, and my two sons, Mathieu and Stephan, were my faithful supporters on this "journey." They may not have always understood its "circuitous route," but had faith that I would endure and succeed; they also tolerated the sacrifices to our family life that ensued. Most importantly, however, I offer praise and thanksgiving to my Advocate, whose inspiration and love were my strength and gave me the confidence to complete the journey.

Abstract

The focus of this research is to explore the effectiveness of sustained dialogue, introduced to four cohorts each representing the educational stakeholders in a suburban school community, as a means to promote critical reflection on the desired outcomes of public education. There were two purposes to the research: to create the opportunity for participants to experience transformational learning through critical reflection, and to create a final document of the desirable knowledge, skills, and attitudes that children should acquire in order to be successful in achieving a desirable future and to successfully meet the challenges they now endure and will face as adults. That final document will become the basis for the development of a new school community mission and vision statement and will hopefully be the impetus for educational reform.

Preface

This research was motivated by an abiding belief that the improvement of the human condition, particularly that of children, and to serve others is our destiny and duty. It is rooted in a respect for the dignity of every human being, and the potential of *every* person to make a contribution to this endeavour and to teach others something meaningful and worthwhile. This thesis is intended to honor the efforts of all those who are responsible for the education of children, particularly those involved in the public education enterprise, and to inspire hope and confidence in them.

Not all dialogue experiences will be as conflict-free as this one; however, manifestations of conflict are opportunities for participants to uncover the underlying assumptions of their attitudes or beliefs in their search for agreement. Such a process requires that the participants be committed to finding "common meaning" and reaching consensus, be willing to free themselves from the impeding effects of their "habits of mind" and "certainties" that they have formed over time, and most importantly trust and be trustworthy. Unfortunately, in other forms of conflict resolution, dialogue is considered only after the parties have determined that "win-lose" mindsets will not achieve their respective goals. In the meantime much grief can ensue; relationships may be destroyed, lives may be lost, and feelings of revenge lead to distorted thinking. Dialogue should be the process that nurtures relationships, rather than a "last resort." Its promise lies in its effectiveness to foster love, hope, and respect, and to develop a new, more accommodating perspective of the world in participants.

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Chapter I

Introduction

One must wonder how people can ever grow tired of each other if there is so much intellect to be discovered in human personalities. The key is to set aside the time for dialogue, no matter what the subject .... It behooves (us) to set it as a priority .... Given the opportunity to speak out in an appropriate environment, ... people would have something 'important' to say--but do we ever give each other the chance?

- Community Cohort Participant

Without 'intentional' direction, priorities, and values, life will go on and the outcome will be left to 'chance' or 'fate.'

- Parent Cohort Participant

These two statements, taken from the journals of two adult participants in the Community School Dialogue Project, reflect the transformational learning that emanated from their experience.

The first statement reflects the impact of the dialogue process, the focus of this research, on one participant's perspective that, to an extent, typifies the assertions of other Project participants. As a result of their dialogue experience over the course of nine months, participants identified several implications regarding human relationships and

communication as part of their transformational learning (see Chapter VI). Among them were: that there is a lack of *effective* communication among people today, particularly in families, organizations, local communities, and among national leaders; that there is so much to be learned from other people, regardless of their status or background; that everyone has a different perspective on reality; and that it is through the sharing of individual perspectives that we can individually and collectively acquire better understanding and knowledge of ourselves, our world, and the relationships between the two. The statement implies a tendency for people to be unwilling or unable to consider other perspectives on reality (or even to consider they exist!) that serves to limit their understanding of it; as a result, decisions are often made on the basis of very narrow, often distorted perceptions of our world.

Engaging in dialogue can potentially reveal the limits of our powers of perception and the unconscious biases that cloud the *interpretations* of our perceptions, i.e., how we think or analyze stimuli, and engender *new ways of perceiving and interpreting reality* (the definition of *creativity* in the context of this research). Perhaps it is only through open, empathetic communication with others--a sharing of perspectives--that we are able to uncover our deep-rooted beliefs, values, and assumptions about reality. As a result, dialogue has the potential to *align our values and beliefs with our actions* (the definition of *authenticity* in the context of this research) thereby changing conflict into disagreement, leading to negotiated resolutions that are advantageous to all parties, creating the conditions for more fulfilling lives and relationships, and creating a more peaceful, harmonious, self-sustaining, and just world order.

The second statement relates to the "product" of the Project, a basis for a vision of education, that includes the key attributes of a desirable future for our children, the challenges and roles they have now and will have as adults; the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA's) they need to acquire in order to lead successful, fulfilling lives; the educational opportunities which should be provided to them in order to acquire the KSA's; and the respective complementary and independent roles of educational stakeholders (i.e., students, their parents, educators, and society) in creating those opportunities. The Project's product therefore represents the "intentional direction, priorities, and values" alluded to in the second statement. With this product as the basis of a new vision of education, participants expressed confidence that the "outcome" (i.e., children achieving success) would be less likely the result of "chance or fate."

Whereas most children already learn some of the desirable KSA's under current circumstances, and are able to overcome their future challenges and successfully fulfill their roles, many do not. At the outset of the Project, participants assumed that, with the appropriate curriculum, educational opportunities and coordinated efforts of all stakeholders, *more* children would potentially achieve this definition of "success."

There is a growing body of evidence that sustained and meaningful educational reform begins with a consensus on a vision of education, that commitment to its fulfillment begins with introspection on a community's values and beliefs. The dialogue process can be an effective means to achieve this consensus, and to engender

commitment, trust, and hope among educational stakeholders. Its greatest potential, however, is to stimulate authenticity and creativity in the visioning process.

The Community School Project appeared to have an impact on participants, judging from their journal entries and interview responses. Through the dialogue experience, they learned a great deal about themselves, about relationships, about communication, and about their "being-in-the-world" (Gadamer, 1988). The dialogue process represents a new way of learning, communicating, relating, and thinking. Participants acquired new skills and new attitudes. They learned that dialogue requires self-discipline and patience, a sincere love of and respect for others, humility and empathy, well-developed communication skills, and a deep-rooted belief that *everyone* has something important to teach us and can assist us in our "personal journey to enlightenment." The dialogue experience was likely an important phase of that journey for everyone involved in the Project.

The following sections will explain the purposes of The Community School Project and provide background information on the research.

Research Rationale

The Community School Dialogue Project was the culmination of my personal journey that began nearly six years ago. Over that period of time, I have critically examined and have come to some conclusions regarding the current state of public

education, the potential benefits in establishing a new partnership with parents and the community in educating children, and particularly my role as an educational leader within it. In this chapter, I have delineated the rationale for this research in two parts: *Purposes of the Research* and *Research Background.*

Purposes of the Research

The purposes of this research were to create the opportunity for a transformational learning experience for participants in order to promote creative thinking, and to consider the potential of dialogue to facilitate critical reflection on public education's outcomes. It was intended to initiate significant educational reform in a school community through the creation of a list of the desirable knowledge, skills, and attitudes which children should acquire in order to be successful in their lives that would form the basis of a new vision of education.

The Project was undertaken with confidence and conviction that immersing representatives of the four educational stakeholders; i.e., students, parents, teachers, and community members who do not have children in school, in critical reflection through dialogue for an extended period of time would provide them the opportunity to transform their perspective on education. They would also become more conscious of their own perceptions and interpretations of certain aspects of reality, i.e., education, and the foundations for those perceptions. The dialogue experience would also uncover the underlying assumptions about what is considered "truth" and "fact." As a consequence,

participants would become more conscious of their own thinking processes, i.e., *how* one perceives and interprets reality, and perhaps become more accommodating of other perspectives, more aware of how limited and distorted their perceptions can be, and more motivated to seek new opportunities beyond the Project to transform their perspectives, which Mezirow (1990) calls *a meaning perspective shift*. New communication skills and attitudes acquired from the dialogue experience would hopefully provide participants with the means to take full advantage of such opportunities.

With regards to the second purpose of this research, I believe that significant educational reform at the school level must involve all educational stakeholders, in a meaningfully way, in decision-making. Potentially, an inclusive dialogue, i.e., one in which all representative educational stakeholder voices are *equally* legitimized, can lead to a re-negotiation of the relationships of power among educational stakeholders and to the identification of new reform initiatives emanating from a new, collective perspective on education that participants would create. Participants would be asked to identify the key attributes of a desirable future for our children, the challenges and roles they have now and will have as adults; the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA's) they need to acquire in order to lead successful, fulfilling lives; the educational opportunities which should be provided to them in order to acquire the KSA's; and the respective complementary and independent roles of educational stakeholders (i.e., students, their parents, educators, and society) in creating those opportunities.

The document that would summarize that consensus on those outcomes would become the basis for a "vision of education" for the school community. This vision would become what Sergiovanni (2000) describes as a *social covenant*, based on "connections among people ... when they are together connected to shared ideas and values. Once achieved, this bonding of people and this binding of ideas form a fabric of reciprocal roles, duties, and obligations that are internalized by group members" (p. 62). The findings of the Project participants would be presented to the Community School Advisory Council, who sanctioned and sponsored the Project, for consideration and dissemination in the school community over the 2002-03 school year. The Council would be asked to sustain the reform process by engaging the entire school community in developing a new vision of education for Community School by building on the Project's findings.

The dialogue would, however, be sustained through action research as changing circumstances and experience would necessitate a periodic review of the outcomes and the means to achieve them. This is the practice that I hope to foster in participants and, eventually, the school community.

As a means of clarifying these two purposes, I have organized this thesis in chapters. Chapter I provides the rationale for the research, including its purposes and the research background. Chapter II outlines the theoretical foundations for the research methodology. Chapter III details the research parameters, describing the process used to recruit participants, the nature of the dialogue sessions, the role of the

researcher/facilitator, and the challenges and ethical considerations of such hermeneutic research. Chapter IV describes the data collection methods used in this research. Chapter V delineates the research findings, organized into themes, which emanated from the participants' journals and interviews. Chapter VI describes and analyzes participants' testimonials, in their journals and interview responses, which allude to the transformational learning they experienced. Chapter VII explains and analyzes the final document produced by the Project participants, as an impetus for educational reform in the school community. Chapter VIII postulates the potential of the dialogue process in other contexts as well as in public education, describes the challenges of participation in this type of research, and the personal benefits of participation in dialogue. It concludes with proposed areas for further research. Chapter IX summarizes my findings, as a result of this research, regarding the "promise of dialogue" in fostering critical reflection and in engendering transformational learning and educational reform.

Research Background

This section will describe my own journey of discovery and reflection that led to the timing, context, and selection of the research methodology and its purposes. It will also state my positionality in the research, as a middle-class, white, long-serving principal with a passionate interest in exploring the feasibility of democratizing the reform movement in education by initiating it in a local setting. It will document how I acquired a whole new perspective on public education and a renewed confidence that reform could be initiated and succeed at the local, school level.

I was inspired to undertake this research as a result of a recent experience that produced a shift in my perspective of my educational role--from that of *staunch promoter* of public education in its current manifestation; to *cynic*, critical of my colleagues and the *status quo* in public education; to *revolutionary*, condemning the whole enterprise and calling for wholesale, immediate, and radical changes to public education to be initiated by those outside the ranks of educators since reform from within was deemed unlikely; and finally to *reformer*, promoting a democratization of educational reform at the classroom and school levels while acknowledging many positive and effective aspects of public education in its current state. The Community School Dialogue Project is the culmination of this "perspective shift."

At the outset of this "journey," I had been a principal in three schools and was rather proud of the twenty-four years I had served my community as a teacher and administrator in four Alberta jurisdictions. I was well entrenched in the educational "establishment." I was generally satisfied that the public education system in this province (one that is similar to that of most school jurisdictions across North America) was performing admirably, despite the plethora of attacks from "outside" interests in recent years. Like most of my colleagues, I dismissed calls for reform from critics as the result of their lack of appreciation of and empathy for the conditions in which educators perform their duties. When those attacks would become particularly vitriolic, I would line up behind my professional organization to defend an institution that I steadfastly believed had served society well and continued to fulfill an important role. This was especially true since the role of educators had over the past two decades expanded and

become even more important and extensive, as the result of the failure of other societal institutions, such as the family, in fulfilling their respective responsibilities.

As a school administrator for sixteen of those twenty-four years in education, I had gained a broad knowledge on our profession and practices, one different than the perspective of a classroom teacher, and had readily identified some areas that were in need of "improvement." Indeed as an instructional leader, I devoted much of my time and effort to continuous improvement, methodically and incrementally, while maintaining a sensitivity to the well-established traditions in public education. I was also attuned to the stress that my fellow educators were already facing in their expanded roles and resisted making any dramatic (i.e., unpopular) changes in the name of reform. As a result, "improvement" was not synonymous with "reform" since my improvement efforts were intended to simply "fine tune" long-standing, traditional educational practices that I supported. I felt a sense of satisfaction with my deliberate efforts to improve some aspects of public education over which I had influence, particularly when I compared my efforts and results with those of many of my fellow educational leaders, whom I felt simply "managed" the enterprise.

My transformation, however, involved a rather disturbing shift in my perspective on public education's practices, mandate, outcomes, and most importantly my role within it. It began when I enrolled in a graduate program in leadership in curriculum and instruction in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta in 1997. I enrolled in a graduate studies pilot project in the Department of Secondary

Education at the University of Alberta, leading to a Doctor of Education degree, as it had been a lifelong dream of mine to someday complete a doctoral program. I joined a small cohort of students (15 in total), selected from among applicants to the program, to complete a series of prerequisite courses over successive fall, winter, spring and summer terms for two years (meeting on a weekly basis), thereby fulfilling the university's residency requirements. Because the successful applicants were all practicing educators, and would therefore not be on campus full-time, we formed a cohort in order to provide us with the opportunity to form a "scholarly community" that would attempt to replicate the rich exchange of ideas that resident graduate students experience. By taking most of our course work together, our group members became familiar and at ease with each other and developed a close relationship that contributed to an open exchange of ideas and perspectives. Our studies were also guided by a cadre of exemplary university professors who became our mentors, introducing us to a wide range of philosophers and provoking us to uncover and challenge our individual and collective assumptions on a number of educational topics.

This exposure to dialogue proved to be extremely enlightening, and my cohort colleagues and I found the experience stimulating. Our assumptions about life and the world, in general, and public education and our roles within it, in particular, were objectified and re-evaluated through the critical reflection in which we engaged. Cohort members and instructors studied the philosophical underpinnings of education and engaged in long, critical analyses of the way people form their perceptions, interpret experience, and create belief systems; i.e., their perspectives. We learned to deconstruct

our perspectives, to critically reflect on the way we form them, and to develop a healthy skepticism about what we perceive as "reality." We began to question and then to re-evaluate all that we had learned and valued about education over our careers and began to critically examine our practices as educational leaders.

Initially, I developed a cynicism as a result of this reflection, concluding that the public education system was not as effective as it *could* and *should* be in its goals, strategies, and outcomes and was not likely to change significantly. I was critical of myself, concluding that I had been deluded in supporting a system that was so glaringly flawed. From my vantage point as a school administrator, who supervised and evaluated teacher practices on a regular basis and reported annually on the results of our efforts as educators, I had already identified inconsistencies between the practices of most educators and the huge body of research on effective educational strategies; however, I had concluded that it was not just a matter of *individual* practitioners performing ineffectively or needing "coaching" on certain aspects of their performance. A crisis in education existed and was far more pervasive than that; "tinkering" with the system was not sufficient. I became very critical of the way that the teaching profession and the supporters of the *status quo* adhere to traditional practices, many of which I believed to be *inauthentic*; i.e., not reflecting the core values, principles and intentions that educators espouse individually and collectively. I focused on what I thought were glaring contradictions between current teaching practices and the body of research on effective pedagogy, such as the practice of instructing children in cohorts that are based on chronological age, a practice that is contrary to what we know from our collective

experience and research: that children learn at different rates under different circumstances. I struggled to rationalize why our profession propagates this and many other ineffective practices and resists substantive reform.

I wondered why more educators did not share my perceptions. It seemed to me that whenever the topic of "educational reform" would arise, most teachers' concerns seemed to focus on their working conditions. The myriad of new challenges educators face today, including a wider range of student needs within the integrated classroom, would typically generate a call for more resources to bolster traditional practices (e.g., smaller class sizes) rather than foster a re-examination and re-consideration of the way we structure schools, program learning, and use resources (especially teacher time). Very promising practices and structures that had proven very effective in research trials were not being adopted or even considered; in fact, most were dismissed as "radical."

Why had well-intentioned attempts at educational reform to date failed to produce any significant changes to the system of public education despite some rather promising and significant results?

I came to the conclusion that most educational stakeholders support this system because their perspectives on educational practices and the outcomes of education have become distorted and their perceptions limited through a socialization process, propagated by teacher associations and traditional school cultures that serve to maintain and protect the *status quo*. I speculated that perhaps it was because educators' day-to-day

regime of dealing with constant demands and accountability precluded the opportunity for critical reflection on our practices and intentions, and the alignment of the two. Rather, it seemed to me that educators' efforts at improvement tend to focus on the "details" of their craft; e.g., "what they do" on a daily basis and on curriculum and serve to hone the skills that maintain the *status quo.* Seldom do they take the time to reflect on the "big picture;" i. .e., our mission as a social institution, the respective roles of educational stakeholders in fulfilling it, the outcomes of education, and the most effective means to achieve them. I acknowledged that educators devote time and energy to do the best they can under challenging circumstances, with dedication and commitment. They do work hard to be effective, as they and the educational establishment define effectiveness and according to the prevailing standards. I blamed our professional associations that appear to resist substantive reform, particularly when proposed or initiated by non-educators such as government officials and business interests.

I was particularly critical of my fellow administrators. After all, school administrators are first and foremost, by legal definition in Alberta, *instructional leaders*. It was my belief that this role description implies a responsibility to be reflective and pro-active in promoting reform, not just improvement. Although many educational administrators fulfill their responsibilities with determination, imagination, and commitment, their efforts in effect merely tinker with the system, and serve to propagate the *status quo*. I felt that administrators--school-based and division-level--believe, perhaps unconsciously, that maintaining the *status quo* and keeping their clients --i.e.,

students, their parents, and governing officials--relatively satisfied *is* the measure of effective performance and all that is expected of them.

I felt strongly that substantive reform in public education was long overdue, and tinkering was not enough; however, I was pessimistic about the prospects of it happening to the extent and in the manner I thought it should. I became quite cynical and despaired at the potential for the changes I envisioned. I remained convinced, however, that educational reform must first and foremost have the welfare of children at heart. Yet the media and my own experience had shown time and time again that educators were failing to address the learning needs of all of our students and therefore not fulfilling the mandate of providing every child with the opportunity to experience academic success. I concluded that *substantive* educational reform would not and could not emanate from the ranks of educators. They were either too immersed in their own narrow perspective to consider new possibilities or too entrenched in a tradition of practice that is propagated by pervasive professional and organizational cultures. In this context, I defined *substantive educational reform* as that which:

(a) promotes *authentic practice* by fostering an alignment of participants' hopes, intentions, and values with their behaviors,

(b) increases support of, commitment to, and hope for public education among educational stakeholders and motivates them to accept responsibility for its success,

(c) articulates the responsibilities of educational stakeholders for the outcomes of public education and thereby establishes new relationships and roles among them,

(d) identifies and implements innovative and promising strategies which enhance the opportunity for *every* student to achieve success in meeting the goals of education,

(e) better prepares students to lead a fulfilling and contributing life in a future world as employees, citizens, and members of a family; and to shape that world pro-actively, and

(f) is sustained by establishing practices which foster research, on-going reflection, collaboration, and dialogue among all educational stakeholders.

I felt frustrated by the lack of opportunity and motivation for educational practitioners to initiate reform from within the system. In the United States and Canada, the vision of public education on local, provincial, national levels appeared to be fixed in people's minds, with traditions that are commonly perceived to be the right and only way to do things. After all, the structure and outcomes of public education had not varied greatly in the past few decades; e.g., we still organize students according to age, the teacher is still the main purveyor of knowledge as determined by a mandated curriculum, and the teacher and standardized tests still determine what is most important to learn and

the extent to which it has been learned by individuals in groups. We have accepted that not everyone can succeed; and legitimized failure on the part of some students (e.g., in Alberta, the "Acceptable Standard" on the annual Provincial Achievement Tests for students in Grades 3, 6 and 9 incorporates a 15% failure rate!). The bureaucracy and myriad legislation and policies on education seemed to serve, to protect, and to propagate this system. Even the clients of public education, the parents and society, have come to believe that "this is as good as it can get" and actively support the propagation of the *status quo* (after all, it is strikingly similar to the educational system in which they were all participants as children and it served them well!).

The situation seemed hopeless. Educators were too occupied and too mired in their own traditions to lead reform. Reform initiatives would continue to be dismissed or ignored. Clearly, I concluded, substantive reform would not likely happen under the present circumstances. If substantive reform were to happen, it would have to be drastic, extensive, and mandated; led by informed, well-intentioned, and iron-willed reformers from *outside* the educational system. Teacher unions would have to be emasculated and control over the structure of education centralized, at least in the short term. I had proposed a revolution in public education.

Over time and with further research and reflection, my perspective shifted once again as I concluded that opportunities for substantive reform from *within* the educational system do exist. Rather than lament the current state of affairs and remain cynical, and because I was unwilling to abandon my life's vocation, I committed myself to initiate

reform as I defined it and to the extent that my power and influence would allow, to proverbially "light a candle rather than curse the darkness." It became apparent to me that the only hope for the reform that I envisioned had to involve individual educators, begin at the local school community, and include the principal as a reform leader. Quinn (1981) identifies this reformer role as the mandate of all leaders.

> The role of the leader ... is one of orchestrator and labeler: taking what can be gotten in the way of action and shaping it ... into lasting commitment to a new strategic direction. In short, he [sic] makes meaning. (p. 59)

My commitment to my profession and to students and my self-confidence were renewed as I embarked on a mission to use my influence and authority to initiate reform, albeit on a local level. My hope was restored and I was determined to leave a meaningful professional legacy in the final years of my career. I perceived public education and my role within it through "new eyes."

As I pondered the perspective shift that I had experienced through my work with the university cohort, I credited the dialogue experience for giving me a new perspective on education, as well as a renewed vigor and commitment in my professional life. The experience had grounded me in my newly discovered values, principles, and beliefs (held "loosely") that would henceforth be the basis for my actions and decisions. If I could undergo such a shift in perspective and experience renewal, could that experience be replicated at a school community level among a group of educational stakeholders?

Could the creation of a dialogue cohort in the school community initiate meaningful reform? With restored faith in my colleagues and renewed confidence in my abilities, it became apparent to me that people *within* the local education community--students, parents, teachers--*can* be inspired to initiate substantive reform and are in the best position to undertake reform. We need not wait for bureaucrats or those outside the arena of public education to "do it to us." I had concluded this for several reasons:

1. most educators have a huge investment in the reform process and its outcomes,

2. most educators are keenly aware of the factors that promote effectiveness and could, given the opportunity, identify those which are counter-productive,

3. most educators are committed to performing their role to the best of their ability and would direct their talents and efforts to reform with the right motivation, and

4. the support of educators is critical to the success of any reform efforts.

I therefore set my sights on finding those opportunities and creating the required motivation for reform at the school community level; thus, I began my transformation to the role of *reformer*.

Educational reform, I came to realize, must begin with a validation and honoring of current practices that are effective, through a reassessment of our mission and creation of a community-based vision of education. To promote reform, rather than improvement, a change in school culture would also be necessary. Sergiovanni (2000) emphasizes "character and community" as critical ingredients for effective, sustained educational reform.

> If we decide that we really want high-performance schools, then we will have to give more emphasis to bonding. Parents, teachers, students, and their families will need to be bonded together into a 'we.' This sense of 'we' transforms them from a collection of individuals to a collectivity with shared interests. But bonding depends upon everyone being bound to a set of shared purposes, ideas, and ideals that reflect their needs, interests, and beliefs .... As schools become authentic communities they begin to take on unique characteristics. They become defined by their centers--repositories of values, sentiments, and beliefs that connect community members together in special ways .... [T]he school's values and purposes become the driving force. As this happens, a new hierarchy emerges--one that places ideas at the apex and principals, teachers, parents, and students below as members of a shared followership that is committed to serving these ideas. (p. 23-4)

I felt that to achieve this fellowship and to identify the "center" of Community School where I was principal, the creation of a dialogue group in the school community,

to include representatives from all stakeholders, would be the answer. It would potentially expand participants' perspectives on public education and, as a result, lead to a new mandate for education with locally-developed priorities, new educational opportunities, new roles for stakeholders, and new ways of organizing the school. Education would become a community endeavour. According to Sergiovanni (2000), community is the heart of a school's "lifeworld," defined by Sergiovanni as the "the stuff of culture, the essence of values and beliefs, the expression of needs, purposes, and desires of people, and ... the sources of deep satisfaction in the form of meaning and significance" (p. 5). The responsibility for the education of children in its broadest context would no longer rest on the shoulders of school personnel. I felt confident that teachers, students, parents, and members of the community who did not have children in school would respond positively to this initiative. Providing meaningful roles for each stakeholder would ensure a more effective educational system. Sergiovanni (2000) promotes this new partnership.

> Community protects the school's lifeworld by ensuring that means will serve ends rather than the other way around. Communities require that people come together to share common commitments, ideas, and values and use this core of ideas as the source of authority for what they do. (p. xiv)

I also felt that participants in such a dialogue group might also accrue the same personal benefits that I had experienced at the university. I was confident that this Project had much potential and was worthy of the effort and time that I and prospective

participants would devote to it; as importantly, however, I was resolute in my belief that the results or "product" of this endeavour would be beneficial to the school community, particularly the children attending the school, and would serve to achieve at least some aspects of my own vision of effective education in terms of its processes and culture. I was confident that the school community would be receptive to this initiative and possessed the conditions to achieve success.

In my tenure, I felt that I had gained the respect and trust of the staff, students, and parents and that they would respond positively to my invitation. I became principal of Community School in August, 1999. The school community enjoys a long-standing reputation for academic excellence and active parent support. The school services a large rural area, with families residing on acreages and farms. It is located in the southeast corner of a rural school jurisdiction on the western outskirts of a large Alberta city. Because of our proximity to the city, most residents are employed there. Others are self-employed. Generally, the people are of a high socioeconomic stratum and have a high regard for education. There are very high expectations of staff to achieve excellent academic results, and to operate a school free from the discipline issues that parents perceive plague urban schools. The relative affluence of the community allows many parents the opportunity to volunteer in the school, with nearly 350 recognized for their contributions on an annual basis.

The school offers programs to students from Kindergarten to Grade 9. The student population, currently about 720, is stable in that there is less than a 2% turnover

during the school year; enrollment has remained static in recent years. There is a very strong alignment on the standards of effectiveness among the staff, parents, and students. Satisfaction rates expressed by the stakeholders on division- and school-sponsored annual surveys are consistently high. This alignment of expectations and the high satisfaction rate may be, in part, the result of the intense scrutiny that the staff and students, and the school's day-to-day operation, undergo as a result of a frequent parent-volunteer presence in the school. Parents in the school cast a critical eye on its proceedings; they are not hesitant to inquire about and ask for a rationale for virtually all aspects of the school's operation. The school is a focal point for this rural community and parents have a tendency to share stories, insights, and opinions regarding the school and the staff. Even though it is a rewarding and exciting place to work, it is not for those who are not willing and able to bring commitment, expertise, and effort to their performance of duties. The staff is very stable, with most having been employed at the school for at least ten years; they have therefore become used to this "fishbowl," high-pressure atmosphere and have created a cooperative, supportive, and professional culture.

Upon my arrival at the school, I had been warmly welcomed in the community by parents, staff and students. I had received numerous affirmations about my performance to date and, therefore, felt that I was highly respected in the community. On virtually all measures, the school community was meeting its mandate established by the provincial government and the Board of Education; in other words, the staff and I were doing what everyone expected of us. I certainly did not lack for challenges and other opportunities to initiate improvement efforts. There were certainly a number of improvement initiatives

to which I could devote my time and energy; e.g., improving the already high stakeholders' satisfaction rates on bi-annual Division surveys, Provincial Achievement Test results, student discipline, and school-community partnerships; all of which have been the focus of Education Plans in recent years. It was also no small task to balance the school's budget every year with declining revenue and constant or increasing expectations for service and resources. Certainly, those challenges were within my abilities to manage and they were, I felt, virtually all that was *expected* of me.

As is the case with most worthy undertakings, I knew that the initiative I was contemplating was fraught with opportunities and risks. It became apparent to me that the vast majority of people were very satisfied with the school's current operation and outcomes and the expectation was for me to simply "stay the course." Why would I risk upsetting people and jeopardizing this tranquility by introducing a process that had the potential to significantly alter a popular tradition? My own reputation would also be at risk, I surmised. If the Project were to fail to garner community interest and sustained participant commitment, and were its results be inconclusive, ignored, unpopular, or not seen as beneficial to the school community, community trust and respect for my leadership might be seriously undermined. I felt, however, that the potential benefits, to the community and to public education, far outweighed the risks and I had confidence that the Project would achieve its purpose to explore the potential for educational reform through critical reflection and dialogue with a representative group from the school community. My experience with the culture at Community School over the 17 months

prior to the commencement of the Project increased my confidence that the school community was ready to consider innovation and substantive reform.

It was precisely *because* the school community was operating so successfully that I thought the prospects for meaningful educational reform were excellent. The Project would not be viewed as a "solution to a problem" or an "alarm bell" that the school community was in crisis, but rather as a critical analysis of our operation, inspired by a staff commitment to strive for continuous improvement. More importantly, however, it would engage representatives of *all* educational stakeholders--students, their parents, the school staff, and the community-at-large--in a dialogue about education, serving as a *reminder* that education is a *community* responsibility. I also felt that the Community School Dialogue Project as action research would be an opportunity to sustain critical reflection and reform as part of our practice and culture. It would be an exploration of the potential of dialogue to promote *authenticity* in participants' behaviors; i.e., an alignment of values and beliefs with goals, strategies, and outcomes. It would also potentially engender *creativity*; i.e., the generation of new ideas that emanate from the sharing of participants' personal perspectives and the creation of a whole new, collective perspective.

Introducing this critical reflection process in a school community would also serve to foster democratic values. Sergiovanni (2000) postulates that what is neglected in our school improvement strategies to date are

democratic ideals essential to preserving and growing the lifeworlds that each of us needs to belong, to find meaning in what we do, to understand how we are connected to a larger and more impersonal world, to express our values and beliefs, and to find significance in our lives. Regardless of what else we do to improve schools, we are not likely to be successful unless these lifeworld conditions are experienced by parents, students, teachers, and others who are locally involved in our schools. (p. xvii)

Chapter II

Theoretical Foundations of the Research Methodologies

In this literature review, I provide background information on this hermeneutic approach to research on educational reform. I explain how dialogue can engender critical reflection, and how participatory/collaborative action research can promote sustained educational reform. It is presented as a rationale for my choice of research methodologies. I have entitled the sections: *Critical Reflection*, *Critical Educational Science Through Action Research*, and *Dialogue*.

Critical Reflection

I propose that effective, sustained educational reform begins with a consensus on a local vision of education that emanates from a critical reflection by all educational stakeholders on the outcomes of education and its priorities. Such critical reflection promotes a new way of thinking and perceiving that aligns hopes, intentions, and values, with means and ends; thereby achieving *authenticity* in people's practices. It is facilitated through a dialogue or *conversation* (as defined by Gadamer, 1988; Carson, 1986; Schon, 1984; and Freire, 1997) among members of a school community.

Carson (1986) proposes that educational research, focusing on school reform, should consider "philosophical hermeneutics" as a methodology. According to Carson (1986), traditional school reform efforts have "been used to exercise a finer and more

complete control over teachers' work .... or practice" (p. 75). As a result, they have failed to create an effective link between theory and practice (the purpose of educational research), have failed to initiate needed reforms, and have served to entrench traditional ways to organize learning and deliver curriculum. A qualitative approach to educational research such as hermeneutic inquiry is a more effective means of initiating reform in that it makes the research outcomes more relevant to practitioners and more likely to be implemented. It engages practitioners in action research; i.e., in identifying the research questions, the desired outcomes, and the most effective means to achieve them. Initiating reform is a matter of fostering *understanding* in educators which, according to Carson (1986), is

> central to hermeneutics in that it is an integral and necessary part of the interpretive process. To understand means that what is understood has a claim on us, we appropriate the meaning to our own thoughts and actions in some way .... [U]nderstanding is not completed unless we see what is understood as applying to us in some concrete way. (p. 82)

The key to fostering understanding is to create the conditions in practitioners that will motivate and allow them to develop a new perspective that eventually leads to the adoption of new behaviors or strategies. Carson (1986) proposes that a hermeneutic approach to educational research on school reform recognizes

> that all questioning arises out of the negativity of experience, that is, that things are not as we had assumed them to be[;] hermeneutic inquiry begins with an attempt to understand the question itself .... Hermeneutic interpretation begins not with direct research into the problem, but with an uncovering of the question to which the problem statement is an answer. The process is inherently conversational in that the participants in the conversation seek to deepen their understanding of the topic of conversation itself. (p. 75)

In the hermeneutic approach to educational research proposed herein, the "problem statement" is the *uncertainty* in research participants as to whether the current structure and processes of public education are meeting its intended purposes and stakeholder expectations. The "questions" that drive the inquiry relate to the purposes and expectations of public education as identified by research participants.

Hermeneutic inquiry, I propose, is best undertaken through dialogue since we objectify reality or "the world" through language. Language is the means through which we "name" or objectify the world and serves as the basis for one's attitude towards and sense of "being in the world" (Gadamer, 1988) or *perspective*. Through dialogue, participants uncover and deconstruct their personal perspectives and begin the process of creating a new, collective perspective on reality, or at least as it relates to one aspect of it --public education. According to Gadamer (1988),

> to have a 'world' means to have an attitude towards it. To have an attitude towards the world, however, means to keep oneself so free from what one encounters of the world that one is able to present it to oneself as it is .... To rise above the pressure of what comes to meet us from the world means to have language and to have 'world.' (p. 402)

To free oneself from "what one encounters of the world" requires a suspension or *bracketing* of our own perspective or attitude towards the world. According to Mezirow (1990), for critical reflection to foster creativity, it requires a hiatus from the "action" of day-to-day practice in order to reassess one's meaning perspectives and, if necessary, to transform them. It requires an openness and readiness to entertain new possibilities and new ways of conceiving reality without necessarily abandoning all that we have come to believe or hold to be true. Rather than replace our perspective, with a new one emanating from critical reflection, we *shift* it. As Gadamer (1988) explains it,

> if ... we overcome the prejudices and limitations of our previous experience of the world, this does not mean that we leave and negate our own world. As travelers we return home with new experiences. Even if we are emigrants and never return, we can still never wholly forget. (p. 406)

"Openness and readiness," fostered through critical reflection, are achieved through a dialogue with others in a setting that is removed from the trivialities and concerns of everyday experience. It requires a kind of seclusion. Schon (1984)

describes critical reflection as "on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, re-structuring and testing of intuitive understandings of experience ... ; often it takes the form of a reflective conversation with the situation" (p. 42). The dialogue process is proposed to be the most effective means of achieving critical reflection and a *transformed consciousness* (Freire, 1997; Mezirow, 1990, 2000; and Bohm, 1996). Transformed consciousness occurs for individuals engaged in the dialogue as they begin to shift their perspectives or "expand their horizons," on, in this case, the education of children in the public school system. Through an exchange of ideas with others or a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1988), participants achieve new understanding, i.e., perceptions and interpretations, which would otherwise not occur. According to Gadamer (1988), *understanding*, which he defines as "an assimilation of what is said to the point that it becomes one's own" (p. 360), comes from the exchange of ideas linguistically, since it is only through language and our interpretation of it that we can ascertain the meaning and intent of others. The language used in a dialogue is critical since it is the most important vehicle for conveying thoughts, albeit with inherent limitations. Through language we uncover and objectify the foundations of our perspectives--our assumptions about the world. It can be a frustrating and time-consuming experience as we struggle to uncover and articulate the foundation of our perspectives through our self-talk and in dialogue with others. It requires newfound listening and empathetic skills (elaborated upon in Chapter III). As Gadamer (1988) explains,

> to understand what a person says is ... to agree about the object, not to get inside another person and relive his [sic] experiences ... (T)he experience of meaning

> which takes place in understanding always includes application .... (T)he actual problems of understanding and the attempt to master it as an art--the concern of hermeneutics--belongs traditionally to the sphere of grammar and rhetoric. Language is the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object takes place between two [or more] people. (p. 345-6)

Because the facility with language varies among people, a dialogue must be sustained long enough to allow everyone the opportunity to find the words that represent the intended meaning *and* to allow for a full interpretation or translation of others' ideas, knowing however that our desire and capacity to understand extends far beyond our ability to use language.

Critical reflection is not concerned only with the "how or the how-to" of action but also with the "why" -- the reasons for and consequences of what we do. Mezirow (1990), who has written extensively on transformational learning, proposes a process of critical reflection that he defines as

> a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs and actions are based .... an assessment of *how* or *why* we have perceived, thought, felt, or acted. (p. 6)....
>
> [The goal of this process is to] correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving .... [and] to becom[e] critically aware of how and why our

presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world. (pp. 1-14)

Smith (1994) alludes to this process when he calls for educators to seek "genuine growth in self understanding ... the consequence of an ongoing four fold action: an opening to others; an engagement with others; ... a form of self-reflection implying self modification; ... [and] re-engagement" (p. 78).

Critical reflection is based on *critical theory* that makes several assumptions about participants' motivation to engage in critical reflection. Ewert (1991) explains it this way.

> Critical theory tries to understand why the social world is the way it is and, more importantly, through a process of critique, strives to know how it should be. Critical theory starts from a critique of ideology, defined as *distorted knowledge*, to enable individuals to become self-consciously aware of knowledge distortions .... [leading to] enlightenment, a necessary precondition for individual freedom and self-determination. (p. 345-346)

Critical reflection through dialogue is an attempt to objectify concepts and beliefs concerning one aspect of the world, so that it can be examined from as many perspectives as possible. Emanating from this examination is a common meaning, one that transcends the subjective perspectives of participants, and which is "greater than the sum of its

parts." Something new comes into being, that had not existed before, and that exists from that moment on.

Critical Educational Science Through Action Research

The development of a *critical educational science*, as proposed by Carr and Kemmis (1986), brings the critical reflection process into an educational context through action research methodology.

> A critical educational science has the aim of *transforming* education; it is directed at educational change....[and] has a view of educational reform that is participatory and collaborative; it envisages a form of educational research which is conducted by those involved in education themselves. It takes a view of educational research as critical analysis directed at the *transformation* of educational practices, the educational understandings and educational values of those involved in the process, and the social and institutional structures which provide frameworks for their action .... [I]t is research *in* and *for* education. (p. 156)

It is proposed that the "participatory and collaborative" reform Carr and Kemmis (1986) foster is best achieved through action research since it must become part of educators' ongoing practices and become a fixture in the organizational life of schools if reform is to be sustained. Participatory/collaborative action research offers the promise

for initiating meaningful, significant educational reform at the grassroots level. It has the potential to empower educational stakeholders, to identify and assign responsibilities to them, to create a vision and reform plan with which they can all identify and to which they can all commit, and to align intentions with action and results. It accommodates a wide range of skills and knowledge on the part of participants and provides them with the opportunity to evaluate current practices and relationships, to be more aware of the possibilities for improvement, and to influence the evolution of teaching, learning and school governance. Ultimately, leadership in the implementation of the strategies that the research produces will be a primary responsibility of educators, who must be inspired to share power with and delegate responsibility to other stakeholders and undertake reflective practices in their repertoire that lead to further research and experimentation.

Hamilton and Zaretsky (1997) define action research as "a process of systematic inquiry into a self-identified teaching or learning problem, to better understand its complex dynamics, and to develop strategies geared towards the problem's improvement" (p. 3). Action research can be envisioned as a spiral of research cycles, each involving the participants in reflection. Each reflective phase yields more information about the issue and increases understanding. Sometimes this understanding leads to new research questions and different focuses. Action is based on reflection. Action research is an open-ended, ongoing, cyclical process. The answers generated for the initial questions lead to new phases of inquiry and reflection. According to Zuber-Skerritt (1982),

> through systematic, controlled action research, ... teachers can become more professional, more interested in pedagogical aspects of ... education and more motivated to integrate their research and teaching interests in a holistic way. This, in turn, can lead to greater job satisfaction, better academic programmes, improvement of student learning, and practitioner's insights and contributions to the advancement of knowledge in ... education. (p. 15)

By situating the research at the school-level, educational reform begins at the "front lines." Lewin, as cited in McKernan (1991), argues that "to understand and change certain social practices, social scientists have to include practitioners from the real social world in all phases of inquiry" (p. 10). Through action research, sustained critical reflection becomes an integral part of educators' practice. According to Deshler and Ewert (1995), the feature that distinguishes action research from other research paradigms is its

> democratization thrust in research ... that recognizes the value of including practitioners, community members, citizens, employees, volunteers .... to the generation of useful knowledge regarding major social, political, economic, technical, cultural, and organizational problems .... (that focuses) on specific desired changes in a specific, often unique, situation. (p. 2)

Action research is *participatory* if it involves more than one practitioner, particularly at the same worksite. Deshler and Ewert (1995) define this type of action research as

> a process of systematic inquiry, in which those who are experiencing a problematic situation in a community or workplace participate collaboratively ... in deciding the focus of knowledge generation, in collecting and analyzing information, and in taking action to manage, improve, or solve their problem situation. (p.2)

Collaborative action research involves a partnership of colleagues from a variety of backgrounds in the research process. They participate as equal partners in the research, reflect on the process and results together, and have mutual interest in the research findings.

Inherent in action research is the commitment to action in the form of improvement through change, and for research by adding *understanding* to current knowledge. Kemmis (1993) believes in the potential to generalize to other contexts the results of collaborative action research, proposing that *critical* or *emancipatory* action research is

> a concrete and practical expression of the aspiration to change the social (or educational) world for the better through improving shared social practices, our

> shared understandings of these social practices, and the shared situations in which these practices are carried out. It is ... about relentlessly trying to understand and improve the way things are in relation to how they could be better. But it is also critical in the sense that it is activist: it aims at creating a form of collaborative learning by doing ... (p. 3)

In order for any form of inquiry into practice to be considered action research, it must be designed, conducted, and implemented by practitioners in a collaborative relationship. It must lead to perceived or measured improvement of practice and its context, over which practitioners must have a degree of control. It must validate and legitimize the current practice as a starting point for inquiry. Most importantly, it must be critically reflective of the research process as it evolves.

Grundy (1988) proposes that there are three minimal prerequisites for action research:

(a) the project takes as its subject-matter a social practice, regarding it as a strategic action susceptible to improvement;

(b) the project proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated; and

> (c) the project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening participation in the project…to include others affected by the practice and maintaining collaborative control of the process. (p. 353)

Necessary environmental conditions include participants with the prerequisite attitudes, knowledge and skills; access to resources to conduct systematic research; incentives and time to become involved; and the mechanisms for additional research on related topics and other concerns.

Dialogue

Definition. Dialogue has its foundation in primitive, even prehistoric cultures in which it was used to impart knowledge of traditions/history, collective values, and religious beliefs. Socrates used a form of dialogue or inquiry in his pedagogy. It is at the heart of children's interactive play as they encounter life together and share the experiences along the way. The skills are therefore intuitive but require honing. What separates dialogue from other forms of communication is its *purpose* of fostering critical reflection; i.e., seeing and relating (i.e., making new connections) to the world in a more fulfilling way. Gadamer (1988) describes it the dialogue process as

> set(ting) its theme before those communicating like a disputed object between them. Thus the world is the common ground, trodden by none and recognized by all, uniting all who speak with one another .... (T)he linguistic world in which we

> live is not a barrier that prevents knowledge of being in itself, but fundamentally embraces everything in which our insight can be enlarged and deepened .... open, of itself, to every possible insight and hence for every expansion of its own world-picture and accordingly available to others. (p. 404-5)

Dialogue is not discussion nor is it merely negotiation. Participants reflect on two processes simultaneously: the nature of the topic at hand (content) and the nature of the communication in the dialogue (process). According to Gadamer (1988), whose concept of *conversation* is synonymous with dialogue in the context of this research,

> a conversation is a process of two people understanding each other. Thus it is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself [sic] to the other person, truly accepts his [sic] point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he [sic] understands not a particular individual, but what he [sic] says. The thing that has to be grasped is the objective rightness or otherwise of his [sic] opinion, so that they can agree with each other on the subject. Thus one does not relate to the other's opinion of him [sic], but to one's own views. (p. 347)

It is not an easy process to learn or sustain. According to Bohm and Peat (1987), "unless the perceived rewards are very great, the mind will not willingly explore its unconscious infrastructure of ideas but will prefer to continue in more familiar ways" (p. 22). This implies that participants need to be fully aware of the purpose of the

dialogue, its process, and its potential at the outset. Participants need to ascribe significance, purpose, and value to the experience in order to invest a tremendous amount of time and effort, and to assume the inherent risks (see Theme IV in Chapter V).

Carson (1986) reports on the benefits of conversation as a mode of doing research in his review of four doctoral studies. According to Carson, "as co-participants in conversation with researchers, practitioners gain new vantage points on their practice" (p. 74). The dissertations were "informed by an explicit intention to move away from positivistic forms of research in order to forge new understandings and to develop new platforms for practical action" (p. 74).

In the context of this research, dialogue is defined as a communication process in which participants engage in conversation with the purpose of co-creating collective understanding/meaning on whatever topics or issues that matter to participants (pre-conceived and emergent), knowing that even this new common perspective is incomplete and contextual, but more inclusive and complete than the individual perspectives of participants. Carson (1986) promotes conversation as a mode of research as a "means to understand and commit oneself to a communal venture of discovering ... " (p. 82) The conversation or dialogue initially focuses on the "big picture," inviting and encouraging each participant to describe his/her perspective on the topic or issue, and building on those perspectives to achieve what Ellinor and Gerard (1998) call the "largest view of reality to be perceived .... (i.e.,) the largest vision of what it is we are considering together" (pp. 53-4). Simultaneously, participants are aware and analyze meta-

cognitively the individual and collective processes of creating that meaning; i.e., how people frame reality and create their perspective, by examining their thinking processes and the assumptions that underlie them. Participants *re-learn* and consciously use a variety of listening and speaking skills, which many believe are innate but have been suppressed by our western culture, that engender reflection, inquiry, creativity, and may lead to a transformation of consciousness or an expanded perspective.

Meta-dialogue. The initial sessions of a dialogue group include a *meta-dialogue*, identifying the characteristics of an effective dialogue and the inevitable impediments to understanding (These are elaborated upon in Appendix G: The Protocols). Without it, participants are likely to engage in *discussion*; i.e., in a competition to determine whose views will form the basis of the consensus, and therefore preclude the openness and readiness that are requirements of critical reflection. Each participant is expected to promote open, empathetic communication and to be vigilant for the inevitable indications of defensiveness, conflict, recalcitrance, discomfort, and physical/emotional responses to the dialogue process among participants that often characterize discussion. Each participant is asked to alert the group to these phenomena as they arise and to work to unveil and analyze their causes.

Sergiovanni (1992) describes our individual and unique perspectives or "views of the world" as *mindscapes*, which he defined as

> the mental pictures in our heads about how the world works ... They program what we believe counts, help create our realities, and provide a basis for decisions. What we do makes sense if it matches our mindscapes. And different mindscapes represent different realities; what makes sense with one mindscape may not make sense with another. Different realities can lead people to behave quite differently. (p. 8)

Our mindscapes are formed as a result of our experiences and serve to create meaning of the world around us (i.e., applying a structure to reality) and also form the basis of our self-image. In fact, according to Gadamer (1988), for each of us "the world exists as world in a way that no other being in the world experiences" (p. 401). Dialogue allows us to articulate those views and to share them with others as a means of expanding our mindscapes. Our attitudes towards the world or perspectives are often based on untested and often unconscious assumptions. Some assumptions are adhered to more strongly for a variety of reasons, including the intensity of indoctrination and the significance of the life experiences that created them. Sergiovanni (1992) cites six modes by which we derive knowledge:

1. *Authority*. Taking someone else's word, having faith in an external authority. For example, having faith in church or Bible.

2. *Deductive logic*. Subjecting beliefs to the variety of consistency tests that underlie deductive reasoning.

3. *Sense experience*. Gaining direct knowledge through our own five senses.

4. *Emotion*. Feeling that something is right: Although we do not usually associate feeling with thinking or judging we actually 'think' and 'judge' through our emotions all the time.

5. *Intuition*. Unconscious thinking that is rational rather than emotional ... Most creative discoveries are intuitively derived, and only later 'dressed up' by logic, observation, or some other conscious technique.

6. *Science*. A synthetic technique that relies on sense experience to collect the observable facts; intuition to develop a test of a hypothesis about the facts; logic to develop the test (experiment); and sense experience again to complete the test. (pp. 16-7)

Sergiovanni (1992) postulates that these six modes not only describe how we think about things in general, they also "describe how we develop and choose .... our personal values and establish within us the value system that determines what is truth, shapes our choices, and determines our behavior" (p. 11). They are the foundation of our personal perspectives. We *unconsciously* seek to reinforce our perspectives as we encounter new ideas or are exposed to others' perspectives. We sometimes selectively choose what we hear and how we interpret future experiences. In fact, as we look for that reinforcement in the words of others, we may conclude that most people perceive and

interpret things as we do. Core assumptions become "certainties, facts and truths," the cornerstones of our perspectives. They are not easily objectified for critical analysis because they are deeply buried in our psyche and certainly not easily changed. Because of their relative permanence, they limit our perceptions and thinking and serve to create "borders" on our perspectives. Gadamer (1988) describes this resistance to new ideas or perceptions as "the unaccustomed blockage that thought undergoes when a proposition, by its contents, compels thought to give up its customary attitude of knowledge" (p. 424).

Dialectic and dialogical skills. After the meta-dialogue process is explained, participants begin to share experiences or perspectives on the object or topic of their dialogue. As they listen, they inevitably compare others' perspective with their own. Out of habit, they will accept or reject what they hear depending on whether it is congruent with their existing views. In order to foster openness and readiness that are the prerequisites of critical reflection, participants are challenged to suspend their "habits of mind." They are asked to be conscious of their initial responses to new ideas and others' perspectives, and to later identify and analyze the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and possible effects of socialization that cause them to filter or reject anything that may not align with their own views. As participants become more sophisticated and skilled in this analysis, they are invited to raise questions of the storytellers to help them uncover the assumptions, beliefs, and effects of socialization that are the basis of their perspectives. The focus is not only on the who-what-when-where-how of the events described, but also on the *why*—the reasons certain actions were taken, conclusions reached, assumptions made.

Through dialogue, participants are asked to become what Ellinor and Gerard (1998) call "witnesses."

> The witness is a part of ourselves that watches the stream of passing thoughts and feelings and thus becomes more aware of the internal thought process. In dialogue this core concept applies to the collective level. We learn to witness our collective thinking and unfolding meaning together--to become aware in real time of how our thinking and the shared meaning we create is impacting us in getting the results we desire. (p. 39)

Through the dialogue process, creativity is promoted as new thought or meaning is being formed collectively. According to Bohm (1996), this occurs when

> one person says something, [and] the other person does not in general respond with exactly the same meaning as that seen by the first person .... [W]hen the second person replies, the first person sees a *difference* between what he [sic] meant to say and what the other person understood. On considering this difference, he may then be able to see something new, which is relevant both to his views and to those of the other person. And so it is back and forth, with the continual emergence of a new content that is common to both participants .... [T]wo people are making something *in common*, i.e., creating something new together [i.e., a new meaning perspective]. (p. 2)

Gadamer (1988) defines *dialectic* as the "art of asking questions and of seeking truth" (p. 330), a critical skill in effective dialogue.

> The art of dialectic is not the art of being able to win every argument .... [T]he person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his [sic] questioning, which involves being able to preserve his [sic] orientation towards openness. The art of questioning is that of being able to go on asking questions; i.e., the art of thinking .... [I]t is the art of conducting a real conversation. (p. 330)

Gadamer (1988) describes the practice of dialectic in a dialogue and its potential to create new meaning perspectives among participants.

> To conduct a conversation requires first of all that the partners to it do not talk at cross-purposes. Hence its necessary structure is that of question and answer. The first condition of the art of conversation is to ensure that the other person is with us .... To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in the conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to out-argue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning .... [T]o question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the solidity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. A person who possesses the 'art' of questioning is a person who is able to prevent the suppression of questions by the dominant opinion ... [and]

> seek[s] for everything in favour of an opinion. Dialectic consists in not trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength .... It is always the speaker who is challenged until the truth of what is under discussion finally emerges. (p. 330-1)

A skill that is a requirement to effective dialogue is *listening*: a thorough, empathetic, and careful sensitivity to what is happening in the group and "inside one's head" (i.e., the self-talk) as the process of dialogue evolves. It also involves listening for the manifestations of the "shared meaning" that the group is creating. Bohm (1996) stresses this skill as a key factor for effective dialogue.

> [C]ommunication can lead to the creation of something new only if people are able freely to listen to each other, without prejudice, and without trying to influence each other. Each has to be interested primarily in truth and coherence, so that he [sic] is ready to drop his [sic] old ideas and intentions. (p. 3)

This form of listening is not a skill that most people practice. De Mare (1972) proposes that the typical way people listen unconsciously contributes to a distorted perspective. It is one of the habits of mind of which participants must be vigilant.

> In 'listening' we make others talk and even say the things we want to hear. We 'read' the world around us; out of the confused mass of sights and sounds we filter off automatically and intentionally almost all that does not immediately concern

> us. We do not even notice them, since intentionality is the fundamental character of subjective processes. (p. 113)

Ellinor and Gerard (1998) reflect on "defensive listening" in which many of us have become socialized.

> Consider that as we were growing up most of us were taught listening as a defensive skill. Listening was about getting clear on what was expected of us so we could remain in the good graces of authority figures. When we were unsuccessful, it usually meant trouble. As adults, many of the dynamics within organizations, communities, and families continue to reinforce this kind of listening. We listen to discover what will help us fit in, keep our job, learn about how to deliver what someone else wants. We listen to figure out who has the power. We listen to anticipate possible danger. Defensive listening can be a highly developed and tuned skill .... It is also limiting .... We have become accomplished at listening from a position of competition, of win/lose, of 'it's me or you.' (p. 102-3)

The practice of listening that is so essential to effective dialogue requires a significant change in the way we perceive and interpret oral information. It is not simply a matter of telling participants at the outset of the dialogue how listening should happen; it also requires the willingness and ability of participants to be conscious of the effects of socialization on the way we interpret experience and to expose those tendencies as they

arise, so that all can objectify them and the process that created them. The intention is to assist participants in dialogue to develop greater self-discipline and introspection. (Chapter VI includes a summary of the views of Project participants regarding the critical importance of listening.)

Participants, in sharing their interpretations of others' musings, begin to uncover the distorting effects of their existing perspective, as they realize how incomplete and inaccurate their perceptions can be. Becoming conscious of this phenomenon and developing enhanced listening skills allows participants to become more effective in gathering information and in considering a broader perspective on a phenomenon *before* taking action or making a decision. This has implications for one's personal and work-lives beyond the dialogue group (see Chapter VIII).

According to Bohm (1996), participants in a dialogue must be ready to

- listen to others with sufficient sympathy and interest to understand the meaning of the other's position properly,
- change his or her own point of view if there is good reason to do so,
- face their disagreements without confrontation [conflict],
- explore points of view to which he or she does not personally subscribe,

- suspend his or her own point of view, while also holding other points of view in a suspended form, and

- give full attention to what they mean. (p. 241-242)

Participants also need to develop a sensitivity to what is happening inside themselves as they engage in dialogue, becoming aware of the thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions (which, like thought, are generated from recalled experiences) that are manifested, and then to articulate the antecedent factors which may have created them. They reflect and share this insight as a means of comparing and contrasting their thinking processes with that of others thereby identifying the subtle similarities and differences. Gadamer (1988) alludes to this process in his description of conversation as a means to achieve mutual understanding.

> Reaching an understanding in conversation presupposes that both partners are ready for it and for trying to recognize the full value of what is alien and opposed to them. If this happens mutually, and each of the partners, while simultaneously holding on to his [sic] own arguments, weighs the counter-arguments, it is finally possible to achieve ... a common language and a common statement [or meaning] .... All understanding is interpretation and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language which would allow the object [of the conversation] to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language. (p. 348-350)

Listening requires tremendous self-discipline and the ability to be immersed in one's thoughts as one focuses on the words and meaning of another person. It also requires periods of silence for reflection as participants take the opportunity to stop and think about the relevance, meaning and implications of what has just been said. Unfortunately, this proves to be very challenging as it is contrary to the process of discussion in which people wait anxiously for a break in the conversation (usually any pause by the speaker--even if it is to take a breath!) or interrupt the speaker. In a typical discussion, the ideas flow into one continuous sentence, making it impossible for anyone to reflect on what is being said (or will be said!). Little learning takes place from such an experience.

The spirit of dialogue. Engaging in dialogue, particularly when it is initiated or mediated by someone in a position of authority (in the minds of participants), can be very risky and even damaging to relationships if its purposes and outcomes are not clearly stated and understood at the outset. Those initiating or facilitating the dialogue and all participants must be committed to its purposes: to create collective meaning, to critically examine individual and the group's perspectives in an open and safe environment, and to act with sincerity and honesty when the time comes to implement decisions that may emanate from the process (see Chapter III on the Researcher/Facilitator's Role). Everyone is to have equal status. This requires a high level of trust among all participants and a commitment to the protocols (see Appendix G). Ellinor and Gerard (1998) emphasize that purpose or intention is at the heart of dialogue.

> No matter how proficient you become with the skills of dialogue, if your intention is unclear or more aligned with competition than collaboration, you will not be able to participate in the creation of true, shared meaning nor build sustainable collaborative partnerships. (p. 63)

The motives of individual participants are also critical to the success of a dialogue process since one's expectations of the experience and any pre-conceived notions of the outcomes will affect what one says (and does not say) and how one acts during the dialogue. According to Gadamer (1988),

> For someone who uses dialogue only in order to prove himself [sic] right and not to gain insight, asking questions will ... seem easier than answering them .... In fact, ... he [sic] who thinks that he [sic] knows better cannot even ask the right questions. In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, which involves knowing that one does not know ... (p. 326)

The purposes of the dialogue sessions must be clearly articulated and understood by all participants if they are to adhere to the *spirit of dialogue*. Benhabib's (1986) *ideal speech situation* is synonymous with the 'spirit of dialogue,' and is defined as

> a set of rules which participants in a dialogue have to follow ..., and a set of relations...which they would have to obtain between them .... [E]ach participant must have an equal chance to initiate and to continue communication; [and] ...

> each must have an equal chance to make assertions, recommendations, and explanations, and to challenge justifications .... [A]ll must have equal chances as actors to express their wishes, feelings, and intentions; ... [T]he speakers must act as if in contexts of action there is an equal distribution of chances to order and to resist orders, to promise and to refuse, to be accountable for one's conduct and to demand accountability of others. (p. 285)

Whereas dialogue may be the "ideal speech situation," realistically there may emerge a hierarchy of influence or power over the group dynamics; e.g., some participants will be more articulate and confident than others. Participants must be aware of this tendency and guard against it by committing themselves to democratic, egalitarian protocols in the dialogue.

Bohm and Peat (1987) define the spirit of dialogue as "the ability to hold many points of view in suspension, along with a primary interest in the creation of a common meaning" (p. 247). Suspension refers to a resistance to act on assumptions, but not suppression of the urge to judge, compare, and discern. One simply becomes aware of those impulses, objectifies them (i.e., detaches oneself from them), and reflects on their origins and implications. One must also not be provoked by the perceived judgments of others that may arise in the dialogue. This suspension in effect creates a "space or stopping" between the thought (judgment) and the subsequent conditioned response (e.g., not listening, self-talk, forming a rebuttal). Smith (1994) refers to this suspension when he challenged his fellow-teachers

> to listen to themselves, to their students, to their collective lives [which] depends first and foremost on a form of *stopping*, and [on] the creation of a space in which we can truly listen and hear ourselves .... [Teachers need to] attend to how we conduct ourselves .... attending to our wholeness, which means attending to our suppressions, our denials .... made most transparent in the faces of those most different from us .... as a reminder of what we are not. (p.76-77)

The creation of those spaces or *stoppings* is critical for deep reflection to occur. Objectifying a person's idea--"holding it out" for all participants to examine, analyze and respond to--and focusing on it before trying to accommodate it into one's existing perspective requires tremendous self-discipline and an abiding desire to consider something from a new perspective. It requires silence, particularly "inner silence" as one resists the urge to judge the idea on its merits and strives to contemplate the idea from the perspective of the person offering it. This silence serves to deepen and broaden participants' understanding of the meaning inherent in statements made. Being conscious of the inevitable judgment and comparison of the other perspective to one's own provides the opportunity for a person to identify underlying assumptions and to expose the limiting "certainties" (inviolate beliefs or notions of truth) that are the cornerstones of our individual perspectives. According to Mezirow (1990), participants must "bracket [their] prior judgments, attempt to hold…biases in abeyance, and, through a critical review of evidence and arguments, make a determination about the justifiability of the expressed idea whose meaning is contested" (p. 10). As the dialogue evolves, the manifestations of these judgments will serve to uncover some habits of mind that have developed from the

socialization process. In fact, they are excellent opportunities for critical reflection on one's perspective (its origins and underlying assumptions), particularly if others' statements provoke an emotional response. Ellinor and Gerard (1998) focus on the limiting influence of judging, a process that dismisses or ignores perspectives or perceptions that do not fit our "filters" and unwittingly reinforces prejudices or distorted interpretations.

> The judging process divides reality into parts and then compares these parts as a way of knowing something about the whole system .... (T)here are two potential pitfalls that can dramatically impact our ability to build a larger picture of any issue that confronts us. The first is that when we focus on the parts alone, we tend to forget that they are not only connected and interrelated with one another, but that the system as a whole is constantly influencing the parts. This continuous dynamic interplay is completely ignored by the judging process, with its focus on comparing the parts to one another. It becomes virtually impossible to develop a system's view of any whole while deeply engaged in judging. The second danger has to do with either/or and both/and thinking .... Either/or thinking fosters competition and exclusivity .... Creating collaborative partnerships ... requires a high capacity for both/and thinking, to explore new ways of working with conflictual [sic] situations and learn to truly value and leverage diverse perspectives. (p. 68-9)

At first, participants may be reluctant to share those judgments, for fear of violating the spirit of dialogue; however, it is critical that they be aired so that the individual and the group can analyze them and deepen their understanding as a result. It is also important to expose all perspectives on the topic.

Bohm and Peat (1987) allude to the commitment that participants in dialogue must make in fostering the process and in seeing it through; most importantly, participants must believe in the virtue and integrity of their colleagues.

> [B]elief...implies trust, confidence, and faith in the essential honesty and integrity of something--for example, a person, an institution, a cultural activity, and ultimately life and creativity. Without such a belief, the serious and sustained commitment that is necessary for creativity will not be possible. (p. 264)

Freire (1997) cites humility as another required attribute of participants.

> [D]ialogue cannot exist without humility ... ; [it] further requires an intense faith in humankind ... in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, [and] faith in their vocation to be more fully human....The foundation of effective dialogue, accordingly, is a love of the world and for people .... a commitment to others .... [and a] commitment to the cause of liberation .... [D]ialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence. (p. 71-72)

The dialogue process may, however, inadvertently perpetuate the very habits of mind it is trying to override when it creates the new reality that is the group consensus. Freire (1997) cautions that facilitators of dialogues must guard against a perhaps unconscious tendency for participants (particularly those who are more articulate, confident or assertive) to impose their view of reality, their vision for the future, and their agenda on others. Freire (1997) directs facilitators to "enter into dialogue with [the people] ... , so that the people's knowledge of reality, nourished by the leaders' critical ['sophisticated'] knowledge, gradually becomes transformed into knowledge of the *causes* of reality" (p. 115). This poses a tremendous challenge to anyone hosting and simultaneously participating in a dialogue group, particularly if that person is perceived as having a position of authority or expertise. (see Chapter III on the The Researcher/ Facilitator's Role.)

Critical reflection as the search for truth

Participants learn a very important lesson from the critical reflection process; i.e., that the new, collective perspective on reality (i.e., common meaning) created through dialogue represents only the *temporal approximation* of reality – in this context, at this time and are by nature *speculative*. Participants must realize that perspectives (individual and collective) are fluid and subject to constant shifting as the result of new awareness and new environmental conditions. In short, one must understand reality as requiring constant redefinition but cannot ever be fully grasped. Gadamer (1988) describes this phenomenon as a "continuing expansion of our own world-picture" (p. 405).

> (T)he infinite perfectibility of the human experience of the world means that ... we never achieve anything but an ever more extended aspect, a 'view' of the world .... (E)very 'nuance' of the object of perception is exclusively different from every other one and that the 'thing-in-itself' helps to constitute the continuum of these nuances whereas ... each one contains potentially within it every other one; i.e., every one is able to be extended into every other one. It is able to understand, from within itself, the 'view' of the world that is presented ... (p. 405-6)

The dialogue should, therefore, continue beyond the research phase and become an integral part of participants' day-to-day practice if the full benefit of the transformation of consciousness is to be realized. Participants not only dialogue on the present situation, but also become aware of the thought-language and the thinking process through which we *present* our view of reality and to objectify them as a means to *re-present* concepts. It is the opening of the 'borders' that are the limits on our perspectives (so that one can conceive other 'realities'), through the exposure and critical analysis of our "certainties," that is at the heart of dialogue.

Is dialogue, therefore, a search for "truth" as a universally accepted understanding of the world or reality? According to Sergiovanni (1992), the concept of mindscapes raises the question of whether an objective reality exists independently of our perceptions. While there is a fair degree of unanimity that it does, the issue of "absolute truth" is more controversial. According to Sergiovanni (1992), "truth is a function of how we see and describe the world--in other words, of our mindscapes" (p. 8-9).

Gadamer (1988) concludes that, indeed, it is only through dialogue that we can appreciate truth.

> Understanding .... is a genuine experience; i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth. The fact that this encounter takes place ... in the linguistic performance of interpretation, and that the phenomenon of language and understanding proves to be a universal model of being and knowledge in general, enables us to define more closely the meaning of the truth involved in understanding ... What we mean by truth ... can best be determined ... in terms of our concept of play .... a game with words playing around and about what is meant. Language games are where we, as learners ... rise to the understanding of the world .... [[T]he play of language itself ... addresses us, proposes and withdraws, asks and fulfils itself in the answer .... In understanding we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we ought to believe. Thus there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free of all prejudices, however much the will of our knowledge must be directed towards escaping their thrall ... [T]he certainty that is imparted by the use of scientific methods does not suffice to guarantee truth .... Rather, what the tool of method does not achieve must--and effectively can--be achieved by a discipline of questioning and research, a discipline that guarantees truth. (p. 445-7)

Dialogue is, in effect, the "play of language" and a "discipline of questioning and research" that Gadamer (1988) proposes; therefore, critical reflection and the dialogue experience *are* a search for truth.

Dialogue is not an easy or comfortable process; however, as it evolves in the group setting, it engenders trust and redefines our relationship with other participants and makes us more considerate of their ideas. It informs us and challenges our very concept of truth. The impact of the experience can, therefore, be considerable.

Chapter III

The Project Parameters

This chapter contains a description of my experience in creating the structures and processes to choose the research participants, to engage participants in dialogue, and to create the final document. I also describe the challenges and rewards of participation that we all experienced, taken from my own notes and from participants' individual journal entries and interview responses. I include recommendations for those who might consider similar research. The sections are entitled *Recruiting Participants*, *Creating the Cohorts*, *Fostering Critical Reflection*, *The Researcher/ Facilitator's Role*, and *Ethical Considerations*.

(**Note**: the codes used to identify the authors of cited journal entries and interview comments in this chapter refer to the cohort to which he/she belonged; i.e., ***C*** = community cohort, ***P*** = parent cohort, ***T*** = teacher cohort, ***S*** = student cohort.)

Establishing the Project Mandate

It was critical to the Project's purposes that the participants did not perceive that the outcomes for the Project, i.e., the vision of education and its implications for stakeholder roles, had been already determined and that the process would simply be an *endorsement*. I created a list of key questions that would provide structure to the dialogue while maintaining as much freedom as possible (see Appendix I). Such a loose

structure to the project presented a challenge in my efforts to explain the nature and purposes of the Project. It was felt, however, that the interest in and commitment to education was strong enough among educational stakeholders in the community that the offer to create a picture of a desirable future and the means to achieve it was all that was required to successfully recruit enough members of the community to initiate the Community School Dialogue Project.

To legitimize the Project, in terms of ensuring participants that the exercise was more than an academic one and that their work would be of significant benefit to the school community, the endorsement of the Community School Council was a key aspect of the Project. Because the Community School Council, which is directed by an executive committee of elected parent representatives, teacher representatives, and the Principal, had shown keen interest in the original Project proposal, it seemed appropriate to ask them to sponsor the Project. The implications of that endorsement, clearly delineated in a motion at the monthly Council meeting in September, 2001, were that the Community School Council would expect to receive a report about the Project's findings in the fall of 2002 and would later disseminate it throughout the school community. The Community School Council would then be asked to solicit feedback from educational stakeholders on the statements and decide how to proceed with implementation of any recommended educational outcomes. It would be up to the Community School Council to determine what, if any, future action that would emanate from the Project.

Recruiting Participants

In December, 2000, a summary of the Project's purposes and process was included in the school newsletter and in January, 2001 an article was published in the local newspapers (see Appendices A and B respectively) as a means of generating interest in the Project. The stated Project intentions were to redefine effective education at Community School, and to devise the programs and strategies that would achieve it for our students. The research, however, represented an exploration of the potential of dialogue to promote authenticity and creativity in participants' deliberations and their results. It had two purposes in mind: to create a transformational learning experience for participants, and to initiate significant educational reform on a local level. In order to ensure that any transformation of consciousness experienced by Project participants would be spontaneous, this aspect of the Project was not discussed with participants. Participants were recruited to participate in a Project that would help establish a new vision of education at Community School, with the input of each stakeholder group, and to devise the educational opportunities in which students would participate in order to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful in their current and adult lives. Consideration would also be given to the respective roles of the stakeholders in achieving these ends.

Prospective participants could be nominated or volunteer to be members of their respective cohorts. In mid-September, 2001 an article appeared in the school newsletter, announcing the commencement of the Dialogue Project and seeking volunteers from all

stakeholder groups (see Appendix A). A brief presentation to all the students in Grades 6 to 9 at Community School was made during an assembly that month. Anyone interested in participating was asked to contact the researcher/facilitator for further information and to receive application forms.

The response from each stakeholder constituency to the invitation to join the Project was disappointing and puzzling. The response to the Project proposal in the spring of 2001 from parents and staff had been enthusiastic and many people had expressed keen interest in participating. Despite the rather extensive information and recruitment campaign, the number of community members who committed to the Project was lower than expected.

Four students, all in Grade 6, who were acquainted with each other, were among the first to volunteer to join the Project. The chair of the Community School Council and another member quickly joined the parent cohort. After a couple of weeks, no other parents had come forward. Another parent participant was recruited while he/she was visiting the school office. He/She was an active participant in school activities (although not a regular attendee at school council meetings) and had expressed a keen interest in educational issues in previous conversations with me. The parent took the information on the Project home and later decided to join. These three parents were the only ones who responded to the invitation. The local school trustee, who was a regular attendee of the school council meetings and had attended the presentation of the Project proposal, stepped forward to join as a community member (whereas s/he did not live in the school

community *per se*, s/he has a vested interest in the school community and did not have any children attending Community School) with a keen interest in the outcomes of the Project. Two other community members stepped forward, both of whom had had children attending Community School in previous years, in response to the Project's description in the local newspaper (see Appendix B). Those were the only three community members to accept the offer to participate.

Recruiting teachers was an even more difficult task. Initially, a few approached me for more information on the Project, but in the end only two teachers volunteered to join. An invitation was then extended to all teachers in the school division to join the teacher cohort, with the intention of increasing its size. No response was received. The decision was made, therefore, to proceed with just two members in the teacher cohort.

Each participant was required to complete a Participant Consent Form, with the parents of the student-participants co-signing, outlining the conditions and expectations of participation (see Appendix E).

The participant interviews held in March/April, 2002 (approximately two-thirds of the way through the Project's term) contained a question regarding the motivation of those who chose to accept the invitation to participate. Given the uncertain nature of the Project (e.g., the timeline, outcome, and impact), why would anyone want to participate in such a process of dialogue? A review of the responses to an interview question regarding participants' motives for joining the Project can be summarized as follows:

1. The Project was an opportunity for exploring the possibilities for reforming the public school system *on the whole*. Community School enjoys a stellar reputation for excellence, so there was no evidence that anyone had particular "issues" with the school that would be addressed through the Project.

I was very interested ... in giving some input and direction with the idea that maybe it would make a difference ... , because I could see, from my everyday experience with young people, ... that there is a deficit ... or a behavior pattern or inabilities to communicate ... (T)he reason why there is a deficit is ... maybe a lack of teaching or a lack of acceptance of that teaching. ***C1***

I'm interested in the future of education and ... any contribution I can make, all the better; and just my role in the community and being part of it. ***P2***

2. The Project provided the opportunity to support the school and to contribute to its efforts for success.

It would fit with my job of representing the community ... for school board ... and to help (the facilitator) ... I wanted to get to know the community members and hear what they had to say ... The more I know about the school and the people of the community, the better I can represent them. ***C***

I joined the Project ... because I had been very active in the community (a

while ago) and I thought it was a good chance to get back into that role. ***C3***

I thought it would be something interesting, ... a good learning experience for myself. I was interested ... just out of curiosity, to know what it would all involve and ... to see how it would be good for the school. ***P1***

I ... joined it so that I could ... make the school ... better and different, and ... meet and see what other parents and cohorts ... and teachers, what their point of view is. ***S1***

I wanted to help the community (and) ... interact with different people, and find ways to improve the schooling [sic]. ***S3***

3. The Project presented an opportunity to expand one's perspective and to challenge one's way of thinking and perceptions about education.

My point of view of education is getting to be very narrow and I'm only seeing things as a teacher ... , so I wanted to expand my horizons and my ideas and my philosophies and hear what other people have to say about it. ***T1***

My [parent] *... said it would help me and be good for me.* ***S2***

4. Participants had a sense of commitment to the school and loyalty to the

researcher/facilitator as its Principal.

Part of the reason I joined was that no one else was and I knew (the facilitator) ... needed people, and I thought it would be interesting. ***P3***

I had a great deal of respect for (the facilitator) ... and I know that it was something important to him; and I thought it was something that could benefit the school in the long run as well. ***T2***

I think everybody involved is very committed and I think (the facilitator) ... personally (has) ... a lot to do with it--the fact that he's) ... so committed to it. ***C2***

5. The Project seemed likely to be a challenging, perhaps fun, activity.

It seemed like it would really, really be a good program to join, and it just seemed like it was going to be fun. ***S4***

In retrospect, the recruitment of dialogue participants may have been more successful had it not been related to formal research. Perhaps people were intimidated by the prospect of participating in a research study, or perhaps they felt that its purposes were more aligned with the researcher's needs than those of the school community. It was therefore critical that the intent and outcome of a dialogue project be clearly outlined

at the outset and that the implications for participants and, where applicable, the target audience, e.g., the school community, be clearly delineated.

Creating the Cohorts

The unique opportunities and challenges that focus groups present in educational research are concisely and thoroughly outlined by Williams and Katz (2001) in their article, *The Use of Focus Group Methodology In Education: Some Theoretical and Practical Considerations.* They provide practical recommendations for using focus groups in qualitative educational research. My own research on dialogue groups had determined that a group of between 15 and 20 participants would be ideal, large enough to allow for some attrition and the opportunity for a wide range of perspectives among participants; small enough to be conducive to providing everyone with the opportunity to actively participate and to be "heard." A relatively representative membership was sought, with student, parent, teacher, and community-based participants. Student participation was limited to Grades 6 to 9, in the belief that students younger than 10 years would likely encounter difficulty with the process (in terms of their communication skills, understanding of the issues, confidence levels, and ability to make the required time commitments).

Four cohorts were created, each representing one stakeholder group; i.e., a parent cohort, a community cohort, a teacher cohort, and a student cohort. Whereas the research

proposal had included the selection of four participants for each cohort, the actual numbers of participants were:

Student Cohort - 4

Teacher Cohort - 2

Parent Cohort - 3

Community Cohort - 3

The cohorts met separately for most of the Project's term, to allow each representative group full rein to address the topics at hand from their own perspectives. It seemed critical to have student voices in the Project, but also that the conditions be created that would ensure their full participation as equals with the adult participants. From past experience, it was felt that simply adding students to an all-adult group would not work to achieve this, since adults do not easily give full consideration to the musings of children, and children can sometimes feel intimidated by adults.

Despite extensive recruitment strategies in the school community (initially) and then to the entire school division (to recruit more teacher representatives), only the student cohort attracted the desired number of participants. One participant noted this potential shortcoming. The small size of the cohorts and their 'responsibility' to represent the views of their respective constituents presented a bit of a dilemma to some participants.

Are we a 'statistically significant' large enough group to pretend to represent the community and to 'impose' our values or a process that may change the way we education children ... ? I would like to think that my opinions are valued, but others may have different interpretations of the issues based on their lived experiences. ***C1***

One participant wondered if the credibility of the final "product" might be undermined as the result of the low number of Project participants.

Hopefully, we can relate this process to more people so that they may be interested in it; ... I'm not sure if we have enough impact--the group size--to make changes within the school. ***C1***

Other adult-participants, mindful of the low numbers of participants in each cohort, cited some advantages.

At one point, I thought there maybe could have been more bodies for each of the groups; and then, after a while, I thought you know that would be ... too many ideas ... to keep in the time frame ... ; so it probably was about the right number of people. I think four would have been a good number ... , just because when you have more people, there's more ideas and sometimes you go off on a tangent. ***C3***

More people in the cohort--thought there would be more; but on the other hand, you've got them broken down into a number of groups. Overall, the participation level I guess is adequate but a couple more people in the group--but then we probably wouldn't get through with the things. ***P2***

Fostering Critical Reflection

Setting the stage. All participants in the Project met on September 29, 2001 at the first of three focus group sessions over the course of the Project to become acquainted and to review the Project's mandate and process. The participants had committed to meet for only three hours that day, so there was little time for dialogue during this first focus group session. Unfortunately, the question that often arose during the recruitment phase and at this session, *How long will this take?*, could not be definitively answered since it was difficult to predict the pace at which participants would work through the key questions (see Appendix I). At that point, participants were informed that their findings (i.e., the "final product") would be submitted to the Community School Council in the fall of 2002, even if all the key questions had not been addressed. At this first focus group session, participants became acquainted, reviewed the meta-dialogue process, identified the desired outcomes of the Project, set the timeline for cohort and focus group sessions, and reviewed the key questions that would guide the dialogue. The "protocols" of dialogue (see Appendix G) were also reviewed and participants assumed the responsibility to ensure adherence personally and by the group. These guidelines were introduced as an attempt to develop in participants what Gadamer (1988) calls *dialectic--*

the "art of asking questions and of seeking truth" (p. 330) and to establish the "spirit of dialogue." They were not intended to restrict participant practices or contrive the dialogue, but were simply reminders to participants to be mindful of the typical behaviors that characterize "discussions" and which are not conducive to the "spirit of dialogue." At the initial focus group session participants had no difficulty relating to the examples of the limiting behaviors that typify discussions.

The process of creating of the key questions (see Appendix I) to provide some structure to the dialogue sessions was a challenging one for me. I was mindful of the importance of determining the right questions, as proposed by Gadamer (1988).

> It is clear that the structure of the question is implicit in all experience .... [A] perfect experience [is one] ... in which we become aware of our absolute finitude and limited being[;] the logical form of the question, and the negativity that is part of it, find their fulfillment in a radical negativity: the knowledge of not knowing .... A question places that which is questioned within a particular perspective. The emergence of the question opens up, as it were, the being of the object .... Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be opened up by the question .... The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be undetermined, in order that a decisive answer can be given .... The asking of it implies openness, but also limitation. It implies the explicit establishing of presuppositions, in terms of which can be seen what still remains open. Hence a question can be right or wrong, according as it

> reaches into the sphere of the truly open or fails to do so. We call a question false that does not reach the state of openness, but inhibits it by holding on to false presuppositions .... Because a question remains open, it always includes both negative and positive judgments. This is the basis of the essential relation between question and knowledge .... The deciding of the question is the way to knowledge .... Knowledge always means, precisely, looking at opposites. Its superiority over reconceived opinion consists in the fact that it is able to conceive of possibilities as possibilities .... All questioning and desire to know presuppose a knowledge that one does not know; so much so, indeed, that it is a particular lack of knowledge that leads to a particular question. (p. 325-328)

In order to create the optimum opportunity for creative thinking and to reveal participants' deeply-held values, it was critical to propose questions that would meet Gadamer's guidelines. Consequently, the key questions that served to guide the dialogue were as open-ended as possible. A number of participants appreciated one aspect of the dialogue that distinguishes it from problem-solving or brainstorming: the fact that the dialogue began with the "big picture" or the context of our shared world. The difference was apparent to at least one participant who shared his/her experience in the world of business.

> *Out there ... we get together and we've got a problem and ... we talk about it in the context of that problem as opposed to ... 'Where are we going as a group or as an organization?;' ... (The dialogue process) ... positioned the context first, where we*

don't do that often times outside ... In the real world, I don't think we have a consensus on ... how the process is supposed to ... happen and ... egos and ... the politics of the organization get involved; the lack of clarity around the issue ... and the lack of focus (are problematic). ***P2***

One participant acknowledged that *starting* with the big picture might be disconcerting for some, particularly those who value efficiency and who focus on the details or the immediate context when tackling a problem or issue.

For a person ... who's the builder, who needs to take the individual little parts and to create the big picture, it might be difficult to go through this process. ***T2***

The questions had to be worded in such a way as to consider all possibilities; however, the Project was admittedly focused on finding definitive answers to the questions. We did not consider the possibilities that were excluded; i.e., asking "If this, then why not that?" because of time constraints and due to the rather narrow focus of the research. It should be noted, however, that the *one* question that was oft-repeated and promoted deeper reflection was 'What does/would that look like?'

The cohort sessions. All cohorts met in the same venue, the conference room in the school's General Office, to facilitate the use of the *Inspiration©* software on the laptop computer and the LCD projector. It lent privacy to the proceedings and provided a comfortable atmosphere with participants seated around a conference table in upholstered

chairs. Outside contact with participants during the dialogue sessions was also facilitated, in case of emergent events, with the venue's close proximity to the school's office phones. Prior to each session, I ensured that the room was available, the computer equipment set up, documents were printed and distributed, and refreshments made available. Participants placed a high priority on faithful attendance at the cohort sessions with the subsequent session date/time scheduled at the conclusion of each session.

The student cohort met for 45-minute sessions, while the community, teacher, and parent cohorts met for two hours per session. The dialogue sessions were consistently invigorating and purposeful. This does not imply that they were task-oriented or that participants were consistently focused on the end product. Even though everyone knew the Project mandate, i.e., to address the key questions, the pace of the dialogue allowed participants to delve deeply into each topic, each idea. The cohorts would move on once everyone was satisfied with the statement. The purpose of dialogue, to create "collective meaning" regarding the topic at hand, was clear in their minds. The protocols included a caution to participants: to be mindful of the tendency for people to interrupt, to avoid formulating thoughts and responses while another is still speaking, and to listen for the meaning or intention behind others' messages. In accordance with the spirit of dialogue, participants consciously created the conditions through which the group could reach a common meaning regarding the topic at hand, by amalgamating individual perspectives and extending it to form a whole new group perspective. Participants were aware of the unconscious tendency for people to close their minds and to seek reinforcement of their existing perspective by listening for supportive statements in others' words and ignoring

or dismissing ideas that contradict or undermine it. In order to avoid this habit of mind, participants had to listen with an open mind and a genuine desire to capture the intent and meaning of the other person's views.

> *(In) the process of dialogue, there is a ... need for 'people' to listen and get a clear, better understanding of what is being said, as well as trying to interpret how the individual intended the words ... (T)here seems to be the listening part of it and then commenting afterwards, not continuing the thought ... Well, we have a topic (and) usually you listen to what the other person says and then you will add on to it or maybe take it in a different direction.* ***C3***

> *(A)s we work together to create statements, ... the words are not as powerful as the meaning/intent/discussion/commitment, ... (i.e.,) the collective insights are more powerful and much more thorough than (that of) any single individual.* ***P2***

Initially, it was my role as dialogue facilitator to refocus the dialogue on the topic at hand on those occasions when the dialogue would stray too far. Over time, however, participants were able to identify this inevitable phenomenon and individually took the initiative to refocus the dialogue.

> *(To) keep your focus and direction, ... someone ... in the group usually keeps the group in check--like 'Hey, does this relate to the bigger picture?'--and our priority (was) ... 'What the bigger picture looks like?' and you always go back (to*

it) ... Without that focus it would just ... be into tangents that we could just keep going in ... We bring it back to how does it apply to this focus question. ***P2***

As far as ... 'covering ground' today, I don't think we got as much done as (the facilitator) ... would have liked. But I think we covered a lot in (the) interaction between us. ***T1***

Such digressions, however, were not taboo or discouraged; in fact, on many occasions they would often prove to be among the most insightful episodes of the dialogue experience. Even though relatively little may have been added to the "concept web" during these tangents, these were occasions for participants to reflect and delve deeply into the ideas presented. At these times, the pace of the dialogue would pick up and the protocols relaxed. People would engage each other vociferously--interrupting, challenging, and asking rather blunt questions. Perhaps this may have been a manifestation of their struggle to reconcile the new learning with their existing perspectives.

For some participants, the dialogue experience seemed to be discomforting at times, perhaps because it exposed to oneself and to the others in the cohort the limits to one's perceptions, the flaws in one's logic, the tacit priorities and values reflected in one's beliefs, and the incongruity that may exist between one's values or ethics and behavior (see Theme IV in Chapter V). There were times when what appeared to be participants' frustration would surface as a result. It was therefore critically important that each

cohort's culture be based on trust and sincere concern for the welfare of each participant (see Theme V in Chapter V).

One aspect of the process that proved useful--some participants would say critical--was the dialogue facilitator's, and later all participants', efforts to *provoke* the cohort members to explain in more detail, (thereby uncovering any tacit and often unconscious assumptions), with such questions as 'What would that look like?' and 'Why do you think/believe that?' For instance, individuals were asked to describe, in detail, how the desirable skill or attitude that had been identified as necessary for children's present and future success would be manifested; i.e., what would the child *do* or how would the child *behave* that would be evidence of the existence of the skill or attitude in the child's repertoire?

> *The challenge of 'what will this look like?' brings clearer thinking of an actual vision rather than just a vague idea ... When I'm at other meetings and ... people start talking about high-level statements, ... (the) words echo in my brain 'Okay; how would that look?'* ***C2***

The result of this exchange was often the uncovering of related ideas that likely would not have surfaced without this provocation. It is critically important, however, in order to maintain participant confidence and the cohort's culture, that probing questions be directed at the group for response rather than to the individual proposing the idea. The dialogue process does not require the speaker to rationalize or defend his/her idea; rather,

it objectifies the statement and 'suspends' it for closer examination and analysis (i.e., to uncover the tacit assumptions that underlie it, and their origin).

> *The dialogue is somewhat like a psychiatrist session. We can dig fairly deep into ourselves and bring things into focus by articulating them.* ***C1***

In an attempt to clarify the ideas proposed, participants would often share stories and examples to support an idea. These were invaluable for at least three reasons. The cohort could gauge more accurately the meaning and intent of each statement. The sharing of experiences uncovered a number of unstated, and perhaps unconscious, assumptions that underlay the statement. Stories represented insight into the speaker's perspective that served to challenge everyone's own.

> *We use examples quite often to illustrate points. This seems important--although time-consuming--because I found that is rather difficult to convey a viewpoint exactly through a phrase.* ***C1***

The key questions created some structure to the proceedings but participants felt that they had license to digress in order to examine an idea from as many perspectives as possible. Sometimes, this probing would result in a complete rejection of the original statement, to be substituted with one that more accurately described the group consensus.

Some participants were more prone to periods of silence, which was perfectly acceptable since participants had been reminded that it was appropriate for one to be quiet at times and to not feel compelled to speak.

> *I like to think about things before I talk and so a lot of times ... in the dialogue, I noticed that for the first fifteen or twenty minutes, I'm basically just sitting there ... unless I'm challenged to really come up with something.* ***T1***

Other participants resorted to other means to help organize their thoughts and to articulate their positions.

> *I always have notes (paper) with me when I come to the dialogue and so I will write down any ideas that I'm not too sure of, and then I might throw it out and discuss it and refine it a little bit ... and so, for me, the note-taking really helps (and it is) part of my thinking process.* ***T1***

At the outset, no one could predict how the dialogue would evolve and to what extend participants would adhere to the protocols and the spirit of dialogue. In the end, every cohort was able to create a culture that was conducive to the purpose of dialogue, with very little need for direction or correction from the dialogue facilitator (see Theme V in Chapter V). This may be evidence of the assertion that dialogue is a "natural" communication process that socialization has suppressed. Given the opportunity and the conditions to engage in dialogue, it seems apparent that anyone with the right motives

can experience a transformation of consciousness and gain a new, more complete perspective. The benefits to the individual and to any group with whom he/she is affiliated are limitless (see Chapter VIII).

The focus group sessions. It was evident from the participants' journal entries and interview responses that the three focus group sessions, at which all participants were in attendance, were very popular among the participants. The Saturday morning sessions, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, proved to be convenient for the vast majority of participants (despite the rather early start!). After meeting the other Project participants at the initial focus group session on September 29, many were anxious to meet again to gauge the other cohorts' progress and to engage in dialogue with people with new, different perspectives.

At the outset of the Project, some of the cohort members knew each other already; e.g., the student-participants were acquainted with each other, the teacher-participants knew each other well and were acquainted with some of the other adult-participants whose children they had taught. Most of the adult-participants knew the school trustee who was a member of the community cohort, and two of the parent-representatives were members of the Community School Council executive.

The second focus group session was an opportunity for participants to re-introduce themselves and to chat over refreshments that were provided. One student was absent from this second focus group session. The purpose of the second focus group

session was to reach a consensus among all representatives on the statements that would describe the desirable future for our children, responding to key question #1. Each cohort had felt the need to meet as a focus group to establish a common base or vision of a desirable future prior to further dialogue.

A written summary of each cohort's responses to key question #1 (see Appendix I) was circulated to each attendee. The focus group was divided into two sub-groups that consisted of representatives from each cohort. The sub-groups met separately for two hours to negotiate a consensus on the defining statements. As dialogue facilitator, I circulated between the two sub-groups to listen and to answer any questions that arose. All focus group members knew that it was their collective responsibility to ensure that no cohort's views were overlooked or overruled. They then came together to share each sub-group's findings. The remaining one hour was spent reaching a consensus on the final statements. Each sub-group chose a spokesperson to present its perspective on this key question. A whiteboard in the meeting room was used to record the statements and to complete the negotiating on the final wording. After about one hour of dialogue, participants agreed with the final wording, for accuracy and completeness, of the description of a desirable future for our children (see Appendix K). In subsequent journal entries and interview responses, everyone in attendance remarked on how well the dialogue had progressed in the focus group session, despite the fact that they had only met together on one other occasion and the adult participants outnumbered the student participants. The adult-participants were deeply affected by the experience of dialoguing with the student representatives (see Theme III in Chapter V).

At the final focus group session on June 22, participants were given a summary of the cohorts' consensus statements for key question #6 which relates to the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA's) that children should acquire in order to be successful in their present lives and in the future as adults (see Appendix L). The summary, prepared by me, was reviewed for completeness and accuracy. Participants were then divided into two sub-groups to engage in dialogue on the educational opportunities that would enable children to learn/acquire the desirable KSA's (key question #6). For each opportunity identified, the role of each educational stakeholder in providing it was also to be included. With the little time available neither this question nor key questions #7 nor #8, related to the complementary and independent roles of each educational stakeholder in developing the KSA's in children, were completely addressed. Consequently, participants were advised that these final key questions would be the subject of further research under the auspices of the Community School Council once they had been presented with the Project findings in the fall of 2002. Perhaps a new dialogue group would be formed and/or the community surveyed to address the last two key questions. It was important, however, that the commitment to end this phase of the Project by the end of June be fulfilled. Should the Community School Council choose to form another dialogue group, the Project participants would likely be the first invited to join.

There is no doubt that the difficulty in establishing cohort sessions at regular intervals, and therefore ensuring that each cohort would progress through the key questions at a more even pace, precluded more frequent focus group sessions. Ideally, a focus group session would have been held at the intended intervals, i.e., after all cohorts

had responded to each key question, in the Project's term for reasons already outlined. In retrospect, there was probably little that could have been done differently to expedite this process. On the one hand, it was clear at the outset of the Project that the cohorts were not to be rushed to complete their deliberations on certain key questions by a fixed date (which might have adversely affected the nature of the dialogue). Whereas the Project participants had obviously set a high priority on attendance to cohort meetings, in terms of their other personal commitments on attending the sessions, the long delays between sessions for some cohorts were probably unavoidable. Regardless, everyone was very satisfied with the progress that had been made in addressing the key questions.

The spirit of dialogue. As the Project evolved, participants had little apparent difficulty adhering to the protocols and demonstrating the spirit of dialogue. The conversations were calm as participants practiced self-control in avoiding interruptions and taking the time to pause for reflection. Participants quickly established a culture in the cohort sessions that was conducive to reflection and introspection (see Theme V in Chapter V). Everyone actively participated in the dialogue, although occasionally one or two participants would contribute more than the others; however, no one expressed any concern with the opportunities to speak and to be heard during the sessions. Perhaps the small size of each cohort contributed to this culture of respect and tolerance.

Typically at the outset of each cohort session, a few minutes were devoted to "chit-chat" and to give participants the opportunity to get a drink (which was provided). On occasion, snacks were provided for the student cohort, which proved very popular,

and provided a small incentive for their participation. Once we were underway, each participant would be provided with a print copy of the findings to date in a list-format (an example is provided in Figure 2 on pages 132-134) and the journals distributed which were coded to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. On the screen, the record of assertions from the last session, were displayed in a "concept web" format (for an example, see Figure 1, p. 131). The sessions would typically begin in silence as participants reviewed the information on the screen and in print, reacquainting themselves with what their earlier dialogue had produced. Within minutes, the dialogue would begin.

Since the protocols had been explained at the outset, participants were aware that their ideas might be challenged and that they should not feel compelled to defend or rationalize them, but rather to explain the intent and meaning as a means of allowing others to perceive the topic from the speaker's perspective. No one ever tried to convince the others of their views or the "rightness" of their idea during the sessions; e.g., by being argumentative. It was apparent that the ideas presented were simply being "put out there" or objectified for scrutiny and analysis. There were no indications of resentment or disappointment if the original idea were changed or replaced with one resulting from group reflection and "meaning making."

It quickly became apparent that cohort participants had one goal in mind: to create common meaning. When a participant would suggest an idea that would be posted on the screen, others felt comfortable to share their perspectives, interpretations, and/or

wording changes. A type of negotiation ensued. Typically, the cohorts would not move on to a different topic or sub-topic until everyone was satisfied that the summary statement on the screen captured the meaning and intent of the group.

There were a number of occasions when participants expressed amazement with some ideas emanating from the dialogue; i.e., the idea had not originated from individuals in the cohort but was created as a result of the merging of participants' individual perspectives on the topic into a common perspective. In this way, the dialogue process generated a high level of creativity among participants. According to participant journal entries and interview responses, this phenomenon was a key motivator for some of them to maintain their commitment to the Project. Many journal comments alluded to the excitement with which many participants arrived at the cohort sessions--anxious to see where the dialogue would take them that day.

Despite the fact that the protocols (see Appendix G) had been shared and adherence to them pledged, no one really knew how the sessions would evolve. The key questions (see Appendix I) proved to be useful in giving the dialogue sessions a focus, while allowing some digression. The use of the *Inspiration©* software also provided structure and focus to the sessions. These conditions provided a sense of predictability and "safety" for participants in that the key questions and the display of the cohort's findings on the screen as the dialogue progressed gave participants the means to refocus on the topic when the dialogue strayed too far off topic. The structure also eased the apparent tension felt by some participants in what may have been some uncomfortable

moments in the dialogue, such as the occasions when the dialogue touched on participants' personal "trials" (e.g., divorce, difficult parent-child relationships), and when the well-intended probing questions (to analyze the relevant underlying issues and assumptions) elicited an emotional response. At those times, however, everyone respected the initiator's right to privacy and his/her emotional well-being and the dialogue evolved to another topic. As the Project progressed, however, and participants became more familiar and comfortable with each other, there were occasions when individual participants welcomed further introspection and analysis of topics of a rather personal nature.

Despite the variety of backgrounds and educational experiences of participants, everyone had equal status. Even on those occasions when a participant would feel inarticulate (i., e., struggling to find the right words to convey the intended meaning), the rest of the cohort would wait patiently and assist the presenter in elaborating on his/her thought without judging or making suggestions for revision. Several of the themes emanating from an analysis of participants' journals and interview responses provide insight on this experience with the dialogue process (see Chapter V).

The intensity with which participants, particularly the adults, would engage in the dialogue was at once physically draining and mentally stimulating. Participants appeared to be genuinely interested in listening what others had to say and to gain understanding. The natural, unconscious tendency to dismiss out of hand those opinions that seemed to be contrary to one's own, or to formulate a response *while the person was still speaking*,

appeared to be suspended in all sessions since there was little debate *per se* evidenced. Perhaps participants' close proximity around the table and their declared commitment at the outset to be patient and to listen to a person's comments, in their entirety without interruption, contributed to this. It appeared from journal entries and from observations of participants' body language (e.g., moving forward to hear better and maintaining eye contact) that they were not only practicing self-discipline in not preparing a retort, but were also open to understanding the full meaning of another's statements. As a respectful and trusting culture developed in each cohort, participants felt valued and therefore became more willing to share their views, overcoming an initial self-consciousness and lack of confidence (see Theme IV in Chapter V).

The student cohort was perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of the Project for me. They consistently reflected a level of understanding and maturity, in discussing their current and future challenges, that far exceeded my expectations (and, through the focus group sessions, those of the other adult participants). One would not have expected that these rather young (ages 11 and 12 years) people would have knowledge of, and certainly not a grasp on, some of the key issues our society faces. The experience convinced many of us, as adults, that we do not give children enough credit to be able to understand the "bigger issues" and, as a result do not often give them meaningful input in decision-making. Consequently, we are missing a perspective that only they can provide, one that should not be ignored. Predictably, however, the students focused more on certain issues than did the adult participants, such as the desire for a peaceful, safe world, stable and nurturing families, the environment, human rights, education, independent

living and financial security (see Appendix J). These may indicate the priorities in children's lives and indicate that they do think about and are concerned with their future and that of the world.

I never doubted the significance of the Project, particularly its benefit to participants and ultimately to the school community. Even though my long work days sometimes caused my enthusiasm to wane, particularly during the fourteen hour days that included an evening cohort session, I never felt regret or fear that the Project would not achieve my and others' expectations. Participants' loyalty and commitment, manifested by the fact that no one quit the Project and that everyone was faithful in attending the sessions punctually, certainly played a key role in maintaining my own confidence and determination. I felt an obligation to the Project participants who had invested so much of their own time and effort to this endeavour, ostensibly on the basis of their trust in my integrity and abilities; I could not let them down.

In retrospect, the dialogue sessions exceeded all expectations. To some extent, the success of participants in creating the necessary conditions for successful dialogue is attributable to the personalities of the participants and their common affiliation with the school community. For the sake of anonymity and out of respect for their privacy, it is not appropriate to comment on or describe participants' backgrounds. Suffice it to say, that they were remarkably patient with and accommodating of each other. The knowledge that everyone volunteered to participate and could leave the Project at any time also likely contributed to participants' tolerance and personal motivation. Participant

comments highlighted the mental stimulation that the experience provided and the personal benefits accrued (see Chapter V).

The issue of time. The first cohort sessions were scheduled to begin within the first two weeks of October. It was decided that the parent cohort sessions would take place during the school day to accommodate the members' schedules (two were "stay at home moms" and the other was self-employed). Community cohorts would meet during the week from 7 to 9 pm to meet their own work schedules (all held full-time jobs). The student cohort would meet during the noon hour, for about 45 minutes, since all the student participants were bused to and from school. The teacher cohort would meet after school for two hours since all members would be conveniently available at this time. Cohort sessions took place every few weeks (depending on the availability of participants). Sessions would be postponed, if necessary, to accommodate everyone and to ensure that all representatives were able to attend. It was felt that this would engender a sense of commitment among participants (i.e., since the sessions would be postponed if anyone could not attend, participants were more likely to put a priority on attendance).

It was difficult to predict how many sessions would be required to address the key questions; however, prospective participants committed to at least four cohort sessions (in addition to the focus group sessions). Regardless of the frequency of the cohort sessions, all agreed that this phase of the Project, i.e., the cohort and focus group sessions, would not extend beyond the school year (June, 2002). Over the term of the Project, the cohorts met on the following dates:

Student Cohort - Oct. 23, Nov. 29, Dec. 19, Feb. 13, Feb. 22, Mar.4, Apr. 23

Parent Cohort - Oct. 15, Oct. 22, Oct. 30, Nov. 14, Jan. 24, Feb.11, Feb. 26, May 3, May 6, May 13, May 23, May 31

Teacher Cohort - Oct. 1, Oct. 22, Dec. 18, Feb. 5, Feb. 26, Apr. 3, June 11

Community Cohort - Oct. 16, Nov. 5, Nov. 14, Nov. 26, Jan. 29, Feb. 7, Feb. 13, May 21, May 28, June 12

For two of the cohorts, setting session dates/times that would ensure all could attend proved to be a challenge. The student cohort members were to varying degrees involved in other school activities during the noon hours (as a result of the fact that our students are all bused to school which precludes scheduling many activities for after school times) that conflicted with the cohort session dates/times. It seemed critically important to have all four members in attendance for each session in order to provide the greatest opportunity for input and an exchange of ideas, and to ensure that they all felt a sense of commitment to the Project. Even though the students were enthusiastic participants during the cohort and focus group sessions, and expressed a high level of interest in the Project in their journal entries, it was felt that if one or more were to be "excused" from attending (i.e., if the sessions were to go ahead as scheduled without everyone in attendance), it might prove "tempting" to all student participants to simply not show up for a session if there were other things to do. The teacher cohort sessions

also proved to be difficult to schedule, primarily because of all the other commitments cohort members had to attend to. Since the two teacher participants lived a distance from the school, it was felt that evening sessions for the teacher cohort would be inconvenient. The community and parent cohorts scheduled their sessions in the evening.

Determining the schedule for the focus group sessions was also a challenge. At the outset of the Project, the need for all Project participants to meet periodically to share perspectives was established. It was felt that, since one final product consisting of a consensus of all Project participants on the responses to the key questions was an important outcome, the cohorts should meet periodically to align their efforts and direction, and to broaden each of their perspectives and thereby maximizing the opportunity for creativity. The timing and frequency of the focus group sessions was contingent on the progress that each cohort was making in addressing the key questions. The first focus group session took place on September 29, 2001. The second focus group session was scheduled to take place once all cohorts had addressed key questions #1 and #2 on the desirable future for our children and the future challenges they will face (respectively); it was held on March 2, 2002. Unfortunately, because of the erratic schedules that ensued for some of the cohort sessions, the third and final focus group session was not held until June 22.

Despite the longer than anticipated duration of this Project (the dialogue phase of the Project extended from September 29, 2001 to June 22, 2002), all participants remained committed for the entire duration.

The time factor was raised in several aspects of the Project. When people committed to join the Project, upper most in their minds was the question of how often the cohorts would meet, the length of each cohort session, and the timeline for the Project's completion. It was very difficult to accurately answer these questions at the outset. One parameter that was set was that the absolute deadline for this phase of the project, i.e., the cohort and focus group sessions, would be June 28, 2002. We quickly determined that the sessions for the adults would be two hours in length; while those for the students, since they would take place during their noon hours, would be 45 minutes in duration. The three focus group sessions were scheduled on Saturday mornings from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm.

As the Dialogue Project progressed, some participants became mindful of the pace of the deliberations. They had been given the key questions and were able to anticipate in the early stages that the number of sessions would have to be extended beyond their initial expectations in order to address them all. The issue was cited in both the interviews and the journals.

> *I am a bit concerned about the time frame. There seems to be a lot of material ahead and we need to press on, so we don't run out of momentum when the critical recommendations are to be made at the end.* ***C1***

I think it was a little more time-consuming than I thought it would be ... With the longer time that it has taken though, I have had the chance to get to know (the other participants) ... quite well. ***C2***

I had no idea it was going to take this long. I wish it hadn't taken so long because I think that maybe we've lost something by letting it drag on. I just think we would have gotten more out of it if we had done it faster. And I know like it's hard to do, ... working around everybody's schedule, but I think we would have gotten more out of it (with) more frequent meetings .... You really lose the momentum. ***P3***

As the Project evolved, participants began to appreciate the need for the extended timeline as an opportunity at each cohort session to firstly, become more familiar and comfortable with each other and, secondly, to examine more deeply the issues and ideas presented.

It ... was kind of awkward at first; we hadn't really worked with (the others) ... I was a little bit nervous ... and so it kind of took a little bit of time for the chill to come off or to feel more comfortable with them; and so, maybe we could have spent a little more time getting to know each other a little bit more. ***T1***

A surprisingly respectable amount of work was done which, ever so slowly but surely, crystallized into a rather tangible product. ***C1***

No way we could have fathomed (the issues) ... during a shorter period of time. ***C1***

Prior to the meeting ... , I had felt the Project would have been more effective if we had carried (it) out in a shorter time. During the course of the meeting, I changed my mind and now feel that we have likely benefited from the length of time the Project is taking. ***P3***

Our ideas were changed or expanded. That's the reason it took so long to discuss each topic. ***T1***

If and when we see how much our ideas differed from the other cohort groups, I'm sure that the difference will be due to a lack of time rather than a difference of opinion. ***T2***

(If) the discussions wouldn't of been so long, ... we would have just skimmed over topics and never really understood them. ***S2***

Despite the concerns over the longer-than-expected timeline, there were some participants who bemoaned the *lack* of time to 'complete' the analyses.

My retentive personality tells me that we should be farther along in answering our questions, but I'm happy that we touched on some of the areas that we did.

Each of these questions is so huge that I fear that we do none of them justice with our superficial overview. But I guess that even the longest journey does begin with (a) single step. ***T2***

We were not able to cover as much of the challenges and topics as I would have hoped. ***P1***

Wish we could cover more ground, but the issues are big and need clarity. ***P2***

I believe that many of the points we started to discuss ... deserve far more time for discussion. ***P3***

In the end, we did get many of our subjects expanded on and they became clearer. I wish there was more time to go more into each topic around the central question ... (T)he process takes time but (it's) always worth it. We wouldn't have ended where we did without the time invested. ***C2***

Another time-related issue related to the frequency of the sessions and the interval between them. For the adults, the scheduling of sessions was particularly challenging owing to their personal and work schedules. We would try to schedule the next session at the end of the current one. As the Project progressed, a three-week interval seemed to accommodate everyone's schedule best. It was clear from the outset, however, that participants wanted *everyone* in attendance at the sessions. For the students, however, the

situation was slightly more problematic since their sessions were about half the length as those for the adults. As a consequence, we had to schedule more frequent sessions; however, this too presented a challenge as some of the students had other commitments (e.g., track and field practice, cheerleading practice, detention) and some simply wanted to spend time outside during warm weather. As the Project entered its final phase in May and June, it became increasingly difficult for all the students to attend the sessions.

The challenge of engaging others. Periodically, reports on the Project's progress appeared in the school newsletter in articles, prepared by me, over the school term. The purpose of these reports was to inform members of the community that the Project was indeed in progress and to invite feedback or questions to Project participants.

In the mid-Project interview, participants were asked whether or not they had spoken to others about any aspect of the Project. A few reported that they had responded to a few inquiries from friends or family members over the term but no participants had actively sought formal feedback or input on the issues being deliberated. One reason was the issue of time. Participants were already committed to an uncertain timeline with the Project. Hosting "constituency meetings" or other formal feedback sessions would have required even more time and effort than was already committed to the Project, something that the participants were not prepared to do. A few participants reported that they had difficulty explaining the Project's nature and process and that there appeared to be little or no interest expressed by their audiences. As a result, it would have been difficult to initiate meetings for the purpose of garnering feedback.

The response of the school staff to the Project's deliberations was interesting. There were very few inquiries from the school staff to me and to the teacher representatives. There is no doubt that they were aware of the Project's progress since there were periodic reports in the school newsletter and two of their colleagues were active participants. The Project participants from staff were easily accessible. From comments made by the teacher representatives, there were a few questions initiated by staff members but they reflected a passing interest (e.g., How is the Project going?). In fact, one teacher participant reported that some of his/her colleagues felt sorry for him/her because of the time commitment to the Project! Perhaps the staff was content with keeping an "arms-length" relationship with the Project because they were confident that no changes to the school's operation would be initiated without prior consultation. Perhaps some felt a little sheepish about making inquiries since most were aware that only two teachers (out of 37 on staff) had volunteered to participate!

The parent cohort, in late May, proposed that the Project participants issue a progress report to the community and invite feedback on what the participants had concluded to date. They felt that the survey would raise community awareness of the Project's direction and the significance of its efforts and findings, and would provide valuable input that would either endorse the findings to date or provide other perspectives. The other cohorts responded positively to this proposal, which came at the point when all cohorts had completed the first three key questions relating to the desirable future, future challenges, and future roles for our children. After some discussion, it was decided by consensus among the cohorts that a brief survey form would be created and

distributed to all members of the school community (e.g., students, their parents, and staff). In order to provide access to the larger community, i.e., those people in the area who did not currently have children attending the school, it was proposed that an article or advertisement would be published in the local newspapers containing the survey information and soliciting written feedback. A survey was prepared. All cohorts reviewed the document for completeness and accuracy and felt that it was satisfactorily.

At the time that the survey was ready for distribution (early June), there was concern with the timing (the last few weeks of the school year) and the possibility that most people would be too busy with various spring/summer activities to respond to the survey. Secondly, the lag time between the survey's dissemination and deadline for feedback would delay the Project's progress since its purpose was to garner community feedback on the Project's findings to date *prior* to further dialogue. Thirdly, the local school division was in the midst of a system planning study that included the distribution of a detailed survey regarding various aspects of the operation of the division schools. Every parent and staff member was receiving copies of that survey during the last week in May and the first week in June. The parent and community cohort members felt that community members might confuse the two surveys or simply ignore the Project survey since the school division survey had more immediate implications for them. It was obvious to all Project participants that it would not be appropriate for our Project survey to be issued under these circumstances. In the end, it was decided that the survey would not be issued and that community feedback would be solicited through the Community School Council in the fall of 2002. The Project participants pressed ahead with their

deliberations in the mean time. The exercise of creating the survey, however, did provide Project participants with a definitive "status report" on their work to date.

The issue of whether each cohort could legitimately claim to represent their respective constituents without any formal feedback or input process continued to concern at least some members of the adult cohorts. Their concerns were allayed in the knowledge that their findings would be disseminated for community feedback in the fall. They also speculated that their constituents would not likely disagree with what they had produced, but might simply have added to the document through the consultation process. Participants reminded themselves that the "product" of their deliberations was never intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive.

In retrospect, the issue of garnering community feedback would not be easily resolved because of the difficulty in ensuring that all cohorts had addressed some of the key questions by a given deadline and then scheduling a focus group session to negotiate a consensus on the responses. For reasons already outlined, the dilemma was finding an appropriate balance between the emphasis on creating the product (i.e., setting deadlines for the responses to the key questions) and on facilitating the process (i.e., allowing the cohorts to set their own pace of deliberation). In this Project, neither was compromised in that the product would continue to "evolve" while the cohorts were given license to determine the pace of their deliberations.

Given the unique nature of this Project, it was assumed that participants would seek out opportunities to discuss the experience with family, friends, and colleagues--or at least be subject to questions from those aware of their involvement. I was curious about if and how the participants might describe their experience and the Project itself to others. I had experienced considerable difficulty in articulating the Project format, outcomes, and benefits to participants in the documents created and presented to recruit participants. My own frustration from this endeavour led me to include a question in the participant interviews regarding their own experience (see Appendix F).

> *(T)here are certainly challenges and that is to translate this into a positive impact, in the sense (that) I see some difficulty in spreading the experience because it's not an easy thing to do; you almost have to be there to do it; and so, what you have to do is to try to formulate that into something more tangible that you can express.* ***C1***

This respondent's experience reflects my own and that of many of the Project participants. The logistics of the Project, e.g., the number of participants, the frequency of sessions, and the product, were not as difficult to explain as was the dialogue process itself. Participants struggled to explain the experience of "dialoguing" since it is certainly more than "discussion." The reflection and analysis of ideas, leading to deeper understanding of the issues, one's own perspective, and prevailing attitudes, are perhaps the most significant outcome of the experience but one which is impossible to adequately and appropriately describe.

I've tried explaining it as best I can and they're mystified ... You try to explain it ... I guess ... a lot of people just think it's an awful lot of work for maybe not a whole lot of gain ... because they really don't really understand maybe what you're doing. ***P1***

Focusing on the format of the Project as a means to describe the dialogue experience would make the casual observer wonder why a "discussion" on a vision of education and the means to achieve it would take so many sessions and have such an impact on participants. Many participants cited this frustration in their responses to the survey question.

I've talked to my friend and my classmate ... I told them that we're just listing ideas and giving ideas ... They don't say anything; they probably think 'She's crazy!' ***S1***

Other participants cited their inability to adequately explain the scope and depth of the dialogue itself in accurate and comprehensive terms.

When I come out of the meetings, my head is so full, it's like 'Please, explain the bible' (or) 'Tell me how the world works in 25 words or less' ... and that is so difficult, because.... it's really tough to synopsize ... I do find it difficult to share the process with others; again, just because I'm trying to wrap my head around what we've discussed in an individual session. Unless you're in the room, and

you've gone through the process ... of discovering ... I can see that as being difficult for some people, ... a little too intimidating for some people--when they see something that big-- to contemplate breaking it down into individual parts. ***T2***

Interestingly, one of the student participants was able to articulate the experience and, consequently, to inspire other students to consider joining the Project.

I told my class about it and ... I think about four people already wanted to join it because I told them that we were meeting ... and what we were trying to do ... It just seemed like they really wanted to help out with it (because) ... we were just trying to make the school better and trying to get more people involved in school activities. ***S4***

I would speculate that the positive response from the students were based on their assumption that the Project could potentially effect significant improvements in their school experience, and many wanted to have input into the decisions to be implemented.

The Researcher/Facilitator's Role

The use of dialogue as a research methodology, in which the researcher was an active participant, was a departure from the traditional relationship between "researcher" and "subject." Initially, I acted as the dialogue facilitator or moderator for the cohort and focus group sessions and assumed a leadership role in initiating and maintaining the

dialogue sessions. I organized the groups, recruited participants, attended all cohort and focus group sessions, assisted participants in adhering to the protocols and the spirit of dialogue (although this role diminished as participants assumed these responsibilities collectively), recorded session findings, summarized group findings, arranged for distribution of documents emanating from the sessions, helped maintain focus in the discussions (interjecting questions as a means of maintaining the "flow" of the dialogue process), and hosted sessions (providing refreshments and a venue). As the perceived "instructional leader" in the school community (in my role as Principal), I already had credibility in the minds of participants. The role of facilitator for the Project was a "natural" extension to this leadership. Sergiovanni (2000) refers to this as *constructivist leadership*, which he defined as

> leadership as involving a reciprocal process that enables members of a school community to construct meaning that leads towards a common purpose .... [R]eciprocal relationships are the means we use to make sense of our worlds, to continually define ourselves, and to grow together .... Schools that are good at helping members construct meaning and craft common purposes are likely to be highly skilled in building capacity and in developing broad participation among members. This combination ... promotes learning and encourages acceptance of a collective responsibility for the success of the school. (p. 171)

I took part in each session dialogue as a full participant, offering views and asking provocative questions to "deepen" the dialogue (i.e., seeking to uncover tacit assumptions

that form the basis of statements and positions). Participants were reminded that I, as the dialogue facilitator, did not hold any special status and presented my *personal* views while speaking from the perspective of my roles as parent (in the parent cohort), community member (in the community cohort), and teacher (in the teacher cohort) as was appropriate for each cohort session. For the student cohort sessions, I asked questions of clarification and provoked deeper and broader dialogue.

My primary role as the dialogue facilitator, however, was to initiate the dialogue (if it was not spontaneously begun), to stimulate thought and reflection, and to maintain the focus on the topic at hand. As a co-participant, I would offer my views at times, although most of my input involved asking questions of clarification to the group.

Because dialogue participants were likely to digress as they delved deeper and deeper into the meaning and intention of each other's statements and inspire each other to expand on ideas, I was initially responsible (and was expected by the group) to maintain the group's focus on the topic at hand. Eventually, all cohort members accepted this responsibility. Such leadership in the group had to be practiced with discretion and sensitivity. An enthusiastic, positive disposition on my part, legitimizing each opinion or idea offered and maintaining the flow of the dialogue was also critical in encouraging everyone's active participation. The challenge was to determine when it was time to "move on" to another topic or aspect of the dialogue, while ensuring that participants' creativity and confidence would not be stifled as a consequence of the decision to end the

conversation on any particular point or topic. A few participants commented on the dialogue facilitator's key roles.

> *We put up an idea, then (the facilitator) ... asks us 'What (does) it look like?' or 'Define this.' and we get deeper into thought and discussion.* ***T1***

> *You have a mediator that kind of keeps you on track, kind of sees that ... people are being fairly heard and that you're not getting too far off somewhere else; I think it keeps you on the mark more because it's ... formalized and you're there to do a job, not just visit. People get down to work on the issues.* ***P1***

> *(To the dialogue facilitator) Keep probing ideas from people, as it brings clarity to issues--I like this.* ***P2***

> *Seems without a chairperson to ensure discussions are focused, direction is sometimes derailed.* ***P2***

> *The focus and clarity of direction (is maintained) ... if someone in the group consistently or the group (itself) consistently keeps that picture in mind.* ***P2***

The role of dialogue facilitator's role was therefore a challenging one. As a co-participant, I had to be mindful of my status as the instructional leader in the school community (i.e., the Principal), the researcher and initiator of the Project,

and the recorder. In fact, it was my role as the leader of this school community that established my mandate to facilitate and initiate this Project.

My role as facilitator was also akin to that of a host of a dinner party. I invited the "guests," I provided the place, I "mingled" to ensure that everyone was enjoying the experience, and I participated freely in the conversations. I felt it critical, however, that I remain as objective as possible, reserved at times, and cognizant of the possible impact of my comments and decisions on the deliberations (e.g., a possible reluctance to "challenge" me). It was particularly important that participants trusted that I had no preconceived notions regarding the outcomes of the dialogue.

Even though it was apparent that some participants possessed more sophisticated communication skills or had more extensive educational backgrounds (manifested by their confidence levels and articulation), everyone actively participated in the cohort and focus group sessions, by articulating his/her ideas and asking questions. Consequently, I felt confident that my own position of leadership in the school community did not give me any special privilege or authority in the deliberations. One participant, however, commented on the power that the dialogue facilitator as recorder might wield in directing the dialogue.

(In) a dialogue process, the key thing is who's typing that stuff in, because the power position or the control position of those meetings in the future is whoever is keypunching the information in ... The recorder, their job is to capture the essence

> *of the idea and, if you get the wrong person--with an ego or ... the wrong comfort level with themselves--then they're not listening very well and they'll put their slant on it or they'll use their words and aren't open to changing the words ... You've got to find someone that's a recorder ... using the other people's words in the room, as opposed to their words ... The recorder should be going back and ... check(ing) a lot (with the other participants).* ***P2***

I was mindful of this possibility and would often remind participants that there must be consensus on the accuracy and appropriateness of each statement that is recorded; my role as recorder was simply to document the meaning and intent of the *group's* assertions.

In retrospect, participants invested tremendous faith in me; i.e., in my commitment to this Project, in my abilities to maintain momentum and motivation among participants, in my skills to lead the dialogue into deep reflection and analysis, and in my organizational skills to ensure that the Project would achieve its purposes. Most importantly, however, they trusted that their participation would be honored and be worthwhile in fulfilling their own expectations.

I had the good fortune and privilege to attend *all* cohort sessions, acting as the recorder and moderator. It was a fascinating experience, as I witnessed the similarities and differences among the cohorts in how they approached, interpreted and addressed the topics. It was a challenge to keep the cohort perspectives separate in my mind, although

the *Inspiration*© software facilitated this. It was particularly difficult to control the urges to share other cohorts' musings when one group would flounder on a topic or overlook what I thought were obvious aspects of the topic that the other cohorts had identified. I was able to reconcile myself to this situation with the knowledge that all perspectives would eventually come together in the final document and therefore no ideas would be "lost."

There were times when participants would arrive and appeared tired or apologized for their lack of energy. The small number of participants in each cohort, however, meant that it would not be easy for anyone to remove themselves from the dialogue for long. As the Project evolved, participants learned and implemented a number of strategies to engage everyone--especially those who may have been initially distracted. As the conversation intensified, everyone would actively participate. My role as dialogue facilitator in creating and maintaining this culture of trust, mutual support and encouragement, and candor, that is so conducive to effective dialogue, was critical. At the outset of the Project, I had to establish confidence and trust in the prospective participants in order to convince them to join. Since virtually all participants were unfamiliar with the process and were perhaps not sure about the outcomes, they had to have faith in my leadership skills.

Once the dialogue was underway, I had to play several roles: provocateur, mentor, leader, recorder, "wordsmith", and co-participant. I also typed the ideas and findings, generated through the dialogue, into the computer and became expert in the use of the

Inspiration© software. As a participant would offer an idea, as the recorder I would enter it into the computer and display it *verbatim* on the screen. Cohort members would then be asked to elaborate and whether it was "clear" that the descriptor aligned with the meaning and intention of the idea. Each entry was brief, not exceeding five or six words. Over time, all members internalized the key criterion for each entry: *Is it self-evident?* i.e., "*What would that look like?*" and "*Would a student in Grade 4 understand it?*"

There is no question the role of dialogue facilitator requires a number of skills and perceptiveness if the process is to achieve its purpose and if participants' commitment is to be maintained. The challenge for a person acting in this capacity is to be perceived as reputable, legitimate, and authentic. He/She must be able to convey the purposes of the dialogue process and not coerce people to participate. The role could, however, be separated between two people: the leader who initiates the dialogue process and another who "hosts" it. The former may bring people to the "table," the latter must be skilled enough to engage them so that they want to remain involved.

Ethical Considerations

A hermeneutic research methodology presents special ethical challenges to both the researcher and the research participants. In this chapter, I outline the anticipated risks and the process used to alleviate those risks to ensure that the welfare of participants and their relationship with the researcher are considered and protected.

Several ethical considerations needed to be accommodated in this Project in order to protect the participants' psychological health and welfare, and to respect their legal rights. In addition, the provisions of provincial legislation such as the Protection of Privacy/Freedom of Information Act, and divisional policies had to be considered. The authorization of the Superintendent of Schools, School Division, to have this research take place at Community School was assured. In reviewing educational research that used conversation as a methodology and positioned the researcher as co-participant, Carson (1986) warned of its ethical pitfalls.

> During the course of establishing a new relationship between research and teaching, new and important questions of ethics are raised. Direct contact in ongoing conversation should produce a greater trust between researcher and practitioner, but the responsibility is greater too. The potential for harm to the practitioner is very real should this trust be violated. The ethical problem revolves around the development of new practices within an old research culture. The right of informed consent is a valuable protection for practitioners who become involved in research, but this right is made necessary because the activity of research is split off from practice. Certain questions of validity also pose some difficulties for conversational research. (p. 83-4)

In order to avoid these pitfalls and to validate the data, I determined that participants had a right to know the general nature of the research (format, timeline, purposes), the expectations of the researcher/facilitator for participants, the nature and

purpose of the data collection methods, the possible discomforts, challenges, and risks they might encounter during the research process (although no physical or psychological harm is intended or expected), that they may ask questions concerning any aspect of the research and participants' roles at any time, that they may choose to end their participation at anytime, and that they may ask for feedback on the results of the research, including a draft copy of the dissertation when it is available. All this was contained in the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix E).

The success of the research depended on the full cooperation of participants. After all, participants were asked to voluntarily share their thoughts and feelings; however, they had to be informed of their right to decide what they will share and what they will keep to themselves.

Even though participants were asked to sign a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix E), they did not surrender any rights as a consequence. The Consent Form was, in effect, a contract between the participant (and the parent or guardian, in the case of a student-participant) and the researcher/facilitator. It was intended to clearly outline the expectations the researcher/facilitator had of the participant, the identity of those who would have access to the data and the reasons for it (during and after the research--including research supervisors and colleagues), and the eventual disposition of the data. The confidentiality of participants' journals, interview comments, and their identity was protected through the use of codes on all data attributable to individual participants.

The Action Research Guide For Alberta Teachers (2000), based on the work of Carson et al. (1989), poses several questions that the researcher/facilitator addressed as part of the ethics review. A preliminary response to these questions, in the context of this research, follows.

(a) *How might the intended changes proposed as a result of the project affect others?*

Any recommendations for changes to the educational program and/or the school operation at Community School emanating from the Project would have to be approved by the Community School Council and the Principal (after consultation with the school community – staff, students, parents, non-parents – and Division authorities). Reforms would have to adhere to provincial and divisional policies and regulations. Changes would have varying degrees of effect on all stakeholders, a consideration that would be taken into account in the final stages of the deliberations.

(b) *Who had an interest in being informed about the project and its results?*

The research project was operated under the auspices of the Community School Council, representing all educational stakeholders. The results of the Project, in terms of the recommendations for program and organizational changes, are to be

disseminated by the Community School Council. A copy of the final research dissertation would be offered to participants who are interested.

(c) *Who 'owns' the information generated by the project?*

The document containing recommendations that may emanate from the Project became the property of the Community School Council. The dissertation remained the property of the researcher/ facilitator and the University of Alberta.

(d) *How did the project express an ethic of caring for others?*

The "protocols" in the dialogue process, and the identification of the possible challenges and risks participants are likely to face in the dialogue process, were intended to create of a sense of trust, caring, and safety among participants (Appendix G). The expectations and rights of participants, as outlined in the Participant Consent Form (Appendix E), prioritize the welfare of the participants.

(e) *In whose interest are the changes proposed being made?*

Any proposed changes to the school's program and/or operation would have to clearly improve the quality of education for all students, not adversely affect the well-being or working conditions of those most affected--the students and the teachers--and adhere to provincial and divisional policies and regulations.

(f) *Who will 'own' the success or failure of the project?*

Failure of the Project would have occurred if the majority of participants and/or the researcher/facilitator had opted to terminate their involvement in the Project prior to its completion. The Project gained momentum as time passed, as participants assumed shared responsibility (with each other and the researcher/facilitator) for ensuring that the "spirit of dialogue" was maintained, and they sensed the "possibilities;" therefore, they saw it to its conclusion.

Chapter IV

Data Collection Methods

In this chapter, I outline the qualitative methods or techniques used to gather and organize the data emanating from the Project, including the transcripts of participants' interviews and journals and the summaries of the focus group sessions of September 29, March 2, and June 22, and the thirty-six cohort sessions as recorded using the *Inspiration©* computer software. I include an example of the "concept map" that emerged from one cohort session (Figures 1 and 2) to illustrate the format and advantages of the software. The dynamics of the cohort and focus group sessions were examined in Chapter III. I use these process data to describe the participants' transformational learning, including my own, in Chapter VI. The emergent themes relating to those experiences are reported and analyzed in Chapter V. I have entitled the sections in this chapter *Participant Interviews*, *Participant Journals*, and *The Inspiration© Computer Software*.

Participant Interviews

Because the number of volunteers was fewer than anticipated, all volunteers were accepted as participants in the Community School Dialogue Project, although each participant was interviewed at the outset using the questions outlined in Appendix C. There were two teacher representatives, four student representatives, three community representatives, and three parent representatives participating in the cohort and focus

group sessions. Each of the twelve participants was interviewed again approximately two-thirds of the way through the Project's term, i.e., in March/April, 2002, using the questions included in Appendix F. These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by me verbatim in their entirety. Interviews took place in my school office (except in the case of one community cohort participant whose interview took place in his/her home as a convenience) and were between 25 and 45 minutes in duration. Each participant was assigned a code with which all of his/her audio-taped interviews (and journals) were identified for the researcher/facilitator; only I knew the codes. As a consequence, each participant's confidentiality and privacy were respected. The journal and interview transcript provided a record of the evolution of each participant's individual transformational learning.

Participant Journals

Participants were asked to write in their journals at the end of each cohort and focus group session. Some, however, chose to take their journals home for a variety of reasons, including time constraints and the desire to take more time for reflection. Fortunately, all the journals were returned to me at the conclusion of the Project. The purpose of the journaling exercise, expressly stated at the outset, was to document their experiences for the purpose of my research. It was also an opportunity for quiet, personal reflection at the end of what was most often a strenuous exercise. The journaling experience proved to be more of a challenge for some participants than to others.

I think that's a good thing to do; it's not an easy thing to focus because you almost have to, you are almost required to, instantly summarize a big picture ... It's a little more difficult to make more generalized statements because you just went through two hours of details and, to put those into perspective--what do they all mean, what's the theme, what you should do now, how they feel about that-- ... it's not easy to do ... You may be tired and thinking of going home, so you have to force yourself ... You need some reflection. Some people take (the journals) ... home for that purpose; probably (they) have no frame of mind to sit and digest it all on the spot and put it down. ***C1***

Time-consuming; I never have journaled before ... so, it's been something that's been really hard to get used to ... I do tend to procrastinate on that one ... I find I have to concentrate to get everything down in the journal; it's writing, rather than rambling on ... It forces me to reflect on what's been going on over the meeting and (to) recall that; rather than just ... talk and leave. It really made me think about what we talked about and (to) try and make it a little more concise and brings it down to a few ideas that we had from the meeting ... Writing always helps me remember. ***C2***

Afterwards, I think 'Wow! That was an experience!' but (when) I write down what I am thinking, ... most of the time I draw a blank .... You think about what happened during the evening, and there's no real way to put it down on paper.

Like it's going through your mind and the words aren't there; it's the feelings and emotions and, just to put them down, I'm not always capable of doing that. ***C3***

I guess that was a bit of challenge for me; trying to put my experience that was up here in my head actually down onto paper in some form; ... trying to think of something, how to word it, (and) how to explain myself ... You have to think about all the process--what happened there--and try and draw everything together and maybe summarize a bit; but you might not do that if you just walk away from a meeting. You might not take all those things that happened and draw conclusions to what you learned. ***P1***

It's hard; I find it hard because I don't know what to say. I usually end up talking about the issues ... It's not enjoyable; I did do it because that's what we got to do .... When it's easy for me to write, it's because things jump out ... ; but if it doesn't, then it's like force-fed ... It's a clarification exercise; it clarifies the issue a little more, but I don't see that as the purpose ... ; we're not looking for regurgitation of what's on the screen ... It's purpose is to kind of write down, I think, ... my feelings out of the experience and ... a little bit about the content. ***P2***

I like the time that we have to write in the journals because then that does kind of help me to summarize what we've been ... through and what we've talked about and so, most of the time I feel like after it's over, it's kind of finished, but it gives me something to think about ... and maybe discuss with other people ... Writing in

the journal at the end helps me to summarize things, put things in priority for me, and maybe even gives me something to think about for the next time. I'm glad we do it ... (and) I'm glad we have the time to do it, too. ***T1***

It's really tough to put down something when your head is just swimming with so many things that you've discussed ... Even with the tag lines to build upon, it's still kind of like 'Describe a cloud' or something that is quite intangible. ***T2***

You had to really think about what you said and what other people said; you can't just sort of think about it and then think of something else. You had to actually remember it and write it down, so that it really made you listen a lot more. ***S2***

It's sort of like you tell something about what you learned ... easy; I like to do it. It let's me express how I feel ... and get some stuff off of my shoulders some times. ***S3***

It's been really, really cool ... because we can write our thoughts ... about what happened in the cohort meeting ... (It was sometimes hard) just trying to put in your own words and try and still make sense of what you're trying to say ... You can, if you ever want to, ... go back and see what you wrote before and then you don't have to think of it again and again. ***S4***

I have a tendency to, when something impresses me, I'm really focused on ... (it). It forms a very prominent neuro-pathway that I can recall, and it's as good as journaling ... I don't know that I personally benefit from that. ***C1***

Some participants were a little self-conscious about the exercise, expressing some reservations that someone else would be reading the journal.

(It) takes a little bit more, so the concentration and ... someone else is going to be going through it, ... so I think that makes a little bit of a difference, too. ***C2***

Journal writing is not something that I like, not at all. This gets way too personal, (and) ... I don't really like to examine things ... I guess that's what you're supposed to do when you write a journal--you're supposed to reflect ... ; I find it hard--probably more the personal aspects. I suppose it wouldn't be so bad if you didn't know that someone was going to read it. ***P3***

What I write in the journal is really my feelings ... right after the session; and I don't feel like I have to write what would please (the facilitator)--it's just exactly how I think. It just helps me to get things clearer in my mind. ***T1***

The Inspiration© Computer Software

The use of the *Inspiration*© computer software as a means of recording the findings of each cohort session was critical to the success of this research. The *Inspiration*© software provided participants with an effective tool to objectify ideas and to record the shared meaning as it emerged. It was in effect a visual concept map of propositions or concept statements that were linked by lines (which can be labeled) to articulate the nature of the relationship between the concepts. Information related to the main idea or core concept radiated outwards from the general to the more specific levels.

The software was installed on a laptop computer that was then connected to a LCD projector, which allowed the information on the laptop computer screen to be projected, simultaneously, on a large audiovisual screen approximately two meters square. Because of the illuminating power of the projector, the lights in the room did not have to be dimmed for the audience to view the screen (a consideration when there are notes to be read or written). Participants, including the dialogue facilitator, sat around a table with the laptop and projector situated at one end of the table. The audiovisual screen was situated at the other end of the table, far enough away from the projector to allow the image to fill the entire screen. Participants in each of the cohort groups, sat at the end of the table nearest to the projector. The dialogue facilitator as recorder was responsible for entering data and maintaining the display and sat near the projector. This seating arrangement provided everyone with a clear line of sight to the information on the audiovisual screen.

As each statement was made, the dialogue facilitator would input it into the computer, usually verbatim, and have it instantly displayed on the screen. Everyone in the session could then see and respond to it. Figure 1 is an example of a typical concept map that emerged from one cohort's deliberations on key question #1 on the desirable future for our children. (Note: Figure 1 is intended to illustrate the concept map format; the data included can be better ascertained in Figure 2 that follows.)

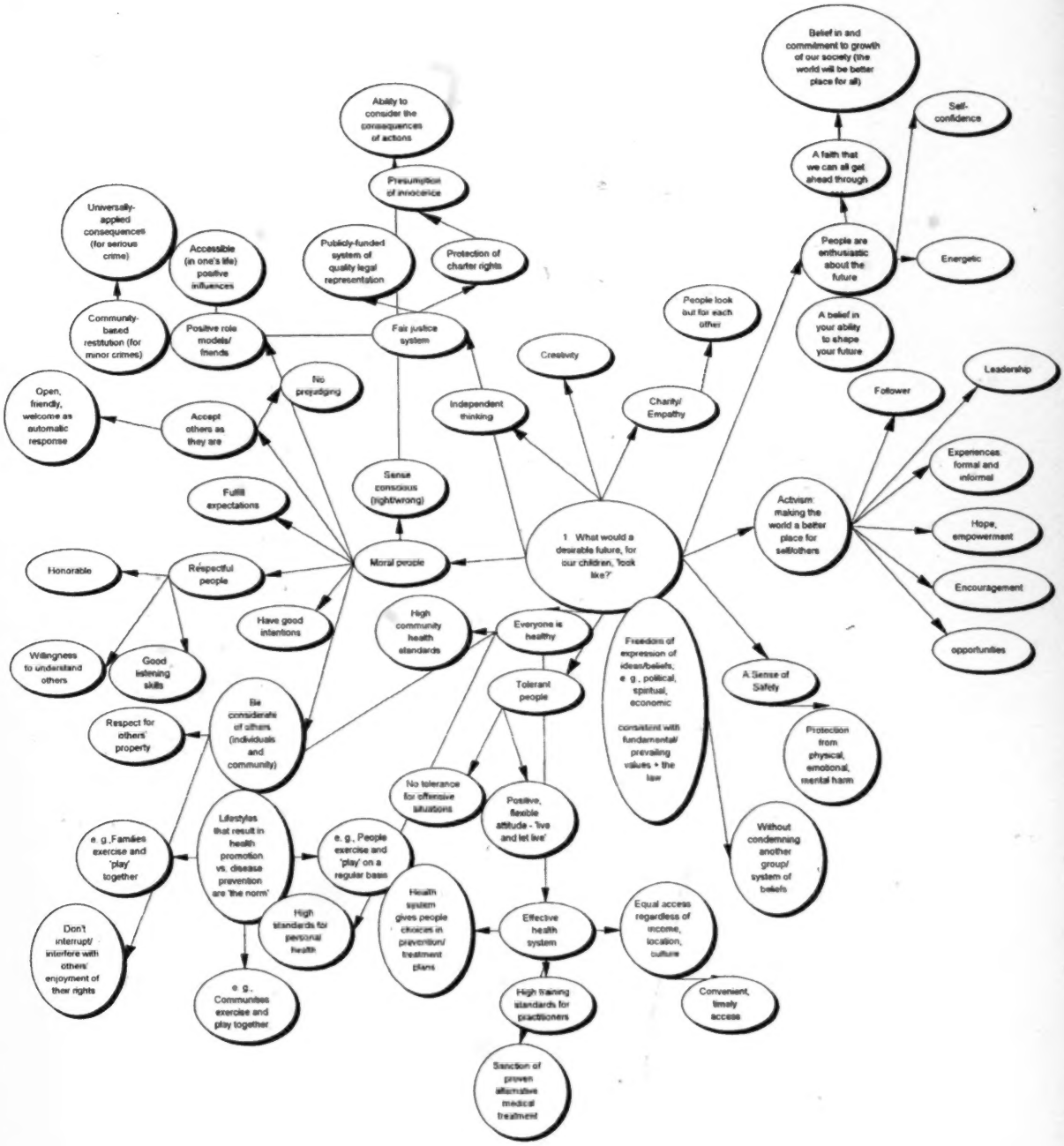
1 What would a desirable future, for our children, 'look like?'
Belief in and commitment to growth of our society (the world will be better place for all)
Self-confidence
A faith that we can all get ahead through ...
People are enthusiastic about the future
Energetic
A belief in your ability to shape your future
Ability to consider the consequences of actions
Presumption of innocence
Publicly-funded system of quality legal representation
Protection of charter rights
Universally-applied consequences (for serious crime)
Accessible (in one's life) positive influences
Community-based restitution (for minor crimes)
Positive role models/ friends
Fair justice system
No prejudging
Open, friendly, welcome as automatic response
Accept others as they are
Creativity
People look out for each other
Charity/ Empathy
Independent thinking
Sense conscious (right/wrong)
Fulfill expectations
Moral people
Honorable
Respectful people
Have good intentions
Willingness to understand others
Good listening skills
Respect for others' property
Be considerate of others (individuals and community)
High community health standards
Everyone is healthy
Tolerant people
Freedom of expression of ideas/beliefs, e.g., political, spiritual, economic
consistent with fundamental/ prevailing values + the law
Activism: making the world a better place for self/others
Follower
Leadership
Experiences: formal and informal
Hope, empowerment
Encouragement
opportunities
A Sense of Safety
Protection from physical, emotional, mental harm
Without condemning another group/ system of beliefs
No tolerance for offensive situations
Positive, flexible attitude - 'live and let live'
Lifestyles that result in health promotion vs. disease prevention are 'the norm'
e.g.,Families exercise and 'play' together
e.g., People exercise and 'play' on a regular basis
Don't interrupt/ interfere with others' enjoyment of their rights
High standards for personal health
e.g., Communities exercise and play together
Health system gives people choices in prevention/ treatment plans
Effective health system
Equal access regardless of income, location, culture
Convenient, timely access
High training standards for practitioners
Sanction of proven alternative medical treatment

Figure 1

An example of a concept map created with *Inspiration*© computer software

1. What would a desirable future, for our children, 'look like?'

    I. Tolerant people

        A. No tolerance for offensive situations

        B. Positive, flexible attitude - 'live and let live'

    II. Charity/Empathy

        A. People look out for each other

    III. Creativity

    IV. A Sense of Safety

        A. Protection from physical, emotional, mental harm

    V. Freedom of expression of ideas/beliefs; e.g., political, spiritual, economic consistent with fundamental/prevailing values + the law

        A. Without condemning another group/system of beliefs

    VI. Independent thinking

    VII. Activism: making the world a better place for self/others

        A. opportunities

        B. Encouragement

        C. Hope, empowerment

        D. Experiences: formal and informal

        E. Leadership

        F. Follower

    VIII. Moral people

        A. Fulfill expectations

        B. Have good intentions

        C. Be considerate of others (individuals and community)

            1. Respect for others' property

            2. Don't interrupt/interfere with others' enjoyment of their rights

        D. Accept others as they are

1. No prejudging
2. Open, friendly, welcome as automatic response

E. Respectful people
1. Honorable
2. Willingness to understand others
3. Good listening skills

F. Sense conscious (right/wrong)
1. Ability to consider the consequences of actions

G. Positive role models/friends
1. Accessible (in one's life) positive influences

IX. Everyone is healthy

A. High community health standards

B. Effective health system
1. Equal access regardless of income, location, culture
a. Convenient, timely access
2. High training standards for practitioners
3. Sanction of proven alternative medical treatment
4. Health system gives people choices in prevention/treatment plans

C. Lifestyles that result in health promotion vs. disease prevention are 'the norm'
1. e.g., People exercise and 'play' on a regular basis
2. e.g., Families exercise and 'play' together
3. e.g., Communities exercise and play together

D. High standards for personal health

X. Fair justice system

A. Publicly-funded system of quality legal representation

B. Protection of charter rights

1. Presumption of innocence

C. Community-based restitution (for minor crimes)

1. Universally-applied consequences (for serious crime)

XI. People are enthusiastic about the future

A. A faith that we can all get ahead through cooperation

1. Belief in and commitment to growth of our society (the world will be better place for all)

B. Self-confidence

C. Energetic

D. A belief in your ability to shape your future

Figure 2

A reconfiguration of the concept map in Figure 1 using *Inspiration* © computer software

The person initiating the comment could decide whether he/she was satisfied that the entry captured the intended meaning. Other participants were then encouraged to negotiate the appropriateness of the statement and to recommend changes.

At the beginning of each cohort session, a print copy of the consolidated data produced to date was distributed to all members (which they were invited to retain for future reference and reflection) and displayed on the audiovisual screen. Participants were invited to review the data for completeness, accuracy, and further revisions. If no further revisions were proposed, and the current heading was complete, another blank template would be displayed on the screen and a key question or concept inserted to begin the concept mapping anew. As the conclusion of the dialogue on a key question in all cohort groups was completed, the dialogue facilitator would consolidate all the data created into one document with each statement coded to represent its cohort source (see Appendix J). This consolidation provided participants with a clear overview of the evolution of each cohort's and the focus group's deliberations as the Project progressed.

Participants identified several advantages to the dialogue process of using the *Inspiration©* software.

1. A summary of the dialogue findings to date provides an accessible reference point on which to build with ensuing conversation.

To summarize (the discussion) ... is very, very important. We derive

(conclusions) ... through quite a bit of discussion, through examples, and so on, and then crystallize out into one word, so ... it has to be there. Now, we all know what it means and it's there as a record while we discuss something else; (otherwise), all you do is lose track and you don't want to overlap things ... because the discussions are wide-spread, sometimes, before we come back to (the) focal point ... It allows a wider view of the topic. ***C1***

Even if you hop a little off topic, it's up on the screen ... , you know you're not too far rambling ... It keeps things focused and on track ... It makes it concrete rather than just abstract. ***C2***

It think it's vital to have it up there. Because when you're sitting there talking, and you get off track, you can always look back and see what you've discussed ... I don't think we would have done nearly as well without it. ***P3***

It enhances the focus--increases the focus--because it's always up there--what you're talking about or where you're going or how you've gotten there ... It helps remind people of what we talked about without a lot of duplication; ... without that, (you) probably get a lot of circular discussion. ***P2***

That really helped me ... to visualize where we had come from and what we had done so far ... I think I would have been quite a bit more confused and forgetting (without it). ***P1***

I think it kept us focused, rather than "What did you say?" and ... we could look and there it was. ***C3***

When we say something and it goes immediately up, it helps me to classify things and to sort out what we're saying; it helps us so that we're not repeating the same thing. ***T1***

If you forget what we were talking about, you just look up on the screen and then you know what we were talking about. ***S4***

2. The display objectifies the concepts or assertions and the relationship among them, and invites deeper analysis.

If you can see it in writing, first you can think about it again ... Sometimes we switch words around then 'there it is'--that's what was meant with this ... It forms mental bridges--listening, then ... seeing, and then ... doing--as far as creating pathways of memory ... I think the visual effect is an important one; ... a visual crutch ... but it's an important anchorage point for your thoughts ...

We can often go back to it, refer to it ... It's very fast to do so it doesn't interrupt the process. ***C1***

Just making things more clear and seeing how they branch off from one another--some of them might be connected to each other (or) others might be off in their own separate groups; so, visually, displaying it like that really helps your mind to organize and categorize the different topics that you're talking about. (I)f you saw where there were gaps--maybe physical holes--that you think 'Now, there's got to be something that goes in there' ... might inspire you to think 'What are we missing?' ***P1***

I think it made the others think and there were quite often word changes and the ideas were sometimes expanded beyond what you were even thinking. ***C3***

I thought it was quite cool how you could get going in all different directions ... Instead of it all being jammed (together), you could spread it out and you could ... work on one topic, spread out from the rest. ***S1***

It's easier to ... put things together because it's in web format. If it was just like a list, it's harder to put things together where they belong ... It's a lot easier to figure out what goes with what. ***S3***

3. The display of a participant's idea legitimizes his/her contribution and engenders confidence.

It's not just a thought or an idea or something you've thrown out just to see what it (looks like, or) how other people react. Once it's upon on the screen, and you see it there, I think it makes it more valid and concrete. ***C2***

You feel like you've been heard ... If the other people in the room are okay with it, they agree with you; so you brought something up that has merit and that everybody agrees with ... It feels good that your idea made it to the ... big screen. ***P2***

I won't just throw something out if I think it's going to go up. I have to have thought it through and have some examples ... If it's going to go up there, I want to make sure that I have thought the whole thing through ... It's not a brainstorming session; it's something that has been thought up, thought through. ***T1***

Sort of makes you feel better and like you can make a difference, and whatever you say will be heard. ***S4***

4. All data are collected immediately and readily available for future reference.

You have them all written down--everybody's thoughts--so then, if they ever come back or something, you could tell them 'I have it right here' so that ... you just couldn't say 'Ah, I couldn't remember.' ***S4***

5. The data are recorded, stored, accessible and amended in a very efficient manner.

I don't see how we could have done this 10 years ago, as efficiently, without that kind of organizational software--to be able to recall it at a touch of a fingertip, to have it pre-organized for you--I mean, when I try to think what it would look like if we (had) tried to do this on a whiteboard or blackboard, I ... I would say that ... it's streamlined it; it's taken out an intermediary of the medium itself because you've gone directly from the person's thought to recording (it) and not let the medium get in the way ... Often, if it takes too long, you lose the message in the medium. ***T2***

There were, however, some perceived drawbacks to the process of summarizing the concepts in just a few words in order to facilitate its display and inclusion in the concept web.

Seems unfortunate that the discussion of some 'big' issues got condensed into one or two words on paper. Seems to lose something. ***P2***

Chapter V

Research Findings: Themes Emanating From Participant Responses

From the dialogue facilitator's own observations and from the transcriptions of participant journal entries and individual interviews, a number of themes relating to participants' respective and collective experiences with the dialogue Project emerged. These themes relate to the participants' observations and evaluative comments regarding the critical reflection process through dialogue and include the challenges they faced, perspective shifts, and the emotions experienced. The identification of these themes was the result of a cycle of analysis and re-analysis of all the participants' feedback once the Project has been completed. With each scrutiny, the number of themes lessened, from the original twenty-nine themes to these nine. Some of these data were later incorporated in other sections and chapters, particularly those that related to the structure of the Project and the dialogue experience. A few of the themes accrued from the common interview questions that were posed to all participants (e.g., the challenges of participation) while others emerged as a result of similar comments made by more than one participant. Evidence of participants' perspective shifts or transformational learning garnered from the journals and interviews, which directly related to one of the purposes of this research, was incorporated in Chapter VI. The selection of the themes highlighted in this chapter is based on what I believe to have been evidence of the most lessons that participants learned from the Project experience. I have used their own words to illustrate the findings. I have entitled these themes *'Thinking Outside The Box': The Challenges of Participation*; *'A Stretching of the Mind': The Impact of Participation*; *'Kids ... As*

Partners': Children and Adults In Dialogue; *'Holding One's Own': Taking Risks in Dialogue*; *'Getting the Right Comfort Level': Creating the Dialogue Culture*; *'This Is Ours': A Sense of Ownership of the Product*; *'Carrying These Ideas Forward': Sustaining Dialogue*; *'Finding Common Ground': Finding Consensus*; and *'The Keys To Success': The Importance of Attitude*.

Theme I: 'Thinking Outside The Box': The Challenges of Participation

As the result of the process of socialization and as an efficient means of "making sense" of reality, people have a tendency to develop certain "habits of mind" (Mezirow, 1990) or patterns of thinking and perceiving that form the basis of one's perspective early in life, thereby creating a sense of predictability and stability. Unfortunately, those patterns also appear to limit our perceptions and thereby distort our view of reality. An awareness of these "habits of mind" and the opening of the "borders of our perspectives" to new views of reality may be triggered by crisis (e.g., when a person's most deeply held attitudes and beliefs are challenged or doubted as a result of tragic event such as the loss of a loved one or a disaster) or by long exposure to another, radically different culture. It is the opening of these borders so that one can conceive other "realities," test assumptions, and be more conscious of one's limited powers of perception that is the purpose of dialogue. Engaging in dialogue with others is a means of "knowing" together, enabling the innate human skills to learn, invent, work and overcome obstacles collaboratively. Eventually, all those "certainties" that have been learned may eventually be "loosened" (but not necessarily abandoned) and objectified so that they can be

scrutinized, tested for their "appropriateness," and reconciled with a new, more accommodating and flexible perspective that will develop as a result of the dialogue experience. This process can be uncomfortable and very time-consuming.

Initially, participants experienced some uneasiness emanating from a failure to grasp the "usefulness" of the dialogue, since it did not appear to have a pre-conceived outcome or formal structure that exists in our traditional means of exchanging ideas (e.g., problem-solving, decision-making, discussions). Participants initially engaged in *discussion* (or more likely *debate*), a process in which participants seek to justify, explain, or defend their personal perspectives and to persuade others to accept their views. At times, they attempted to bring closure to the dialogue in order to reach a conclusion or decision. Often, participants sought to achieve "understanding" through rational analysis and linear thinking; i.e., finding "cause - effect" and "means - ends" relationships among the ideas presented. Even when the purposes and process of dialogue had been clearly explained and commitments made to adhere to the "protocols" at the outset, the effects of socialization caused some participants to unconsciously revert to "old habits." It was a challenge for participants to individually and collectively be aware of these tendencies and to use these episodes as opportunities to critically examine their causes, thereby exposing the "habits of mind," the effects of socialization, and the way the mind "works."

Project participants alluded to the struggle to break the habits of mind and communication they encountered through their dialogue experience. The sub-themes were:

1. Determining how and when to limit the conversation on an issue or topic.

> *There seems to be an endless depth in another person's life experiences from which to draw, listen to and be interested in.* ***C1***

> *(With) more debate, maybe the desirable future vision that we had might have gone to a deeper level; we could internalize a little more ... It's a balance, a trade off ... how much time do you have and how much progress (do) you need to make.* ***P2***

> *To take a look at a picture as big as we're looking at and to try to break it down into smaller pieces, that's a real task because ... the questions are huge. I know that we always talk about that it's not an exhaustive analysis ... , it's just taking a look at certain key parts; but every time we get into the room, we start talking about something, (and) there's a hundred other avenues that suddenly seem like they've become absolutely necessary to talk about as well.* ***T2***

The dialogue ranged far and wide in terms of the topics and perspectives examined. Participants would reflect on many aspects and struggled in trying to convey meaning and intent and to create common understanding. Everyone was aware, however, that there was an objective to be achieved in the Project: to address the key questions. It became very apparent to participants that, after one or two cohort sessions, they had to be willing to bring closure on a particular topic if this mandate of the Project were to be fulfilled within the time allotted. This proved to be one of the most difficult aspects of the dialogue experience as participants found themselves "caught up" in the exchange of ideas.

2. Reaching consensus that the wording of the findings (to be shared with the other cohorts) so that the intended meaning is unequivocally conveyed.

(T)he same words can mean different things to the listener and (therefore) how important it is in communication to seek feedback or use illustrations to convey a message. After all, language has evolved to express abstract ideas--and that is not a precise science. ***C1***

It was sort of hard (to) put into the grade four (words)[since we had decided to use language in our document that students as young as those in grade four would understand] ... because I understand more words ... now ... (than when) I was in grade four. ***S4***

Participants occasionally encountered difficulty in trying to explain their views to fellow-participants, and the group struggled to articulate the common meaning that they had created.

3. Empathizing with others: people who may be of a different generation, people who may have different life experiences, and the stakeholders that participants were "representing."

For instance, adult participants were asked to speculate on the current life experience of children, while the student cohort speculated on the challenges of adulthood.

It is difficult to think in terms of today's children and as an 'older' parent (I) have difficulty envisioning their perspectives and challenges. ***C1***

It's hard to get other points of view if you're not an actual parent or ... whatever. ***S1***

As a result of this difficulty, participants expressed eagerness to hear from the other cohorts (i.e., the adults hearing what the students had concluded and *vice* versa) to compare their speculations with the "firsthand" experiences of the members of other cohorts.

Everyone was looking forward to meeting with the other groups and seeing what they'd come up with and how they thought ... Everybody was truly interested in how everyone else thought and wanted to hear it--more than just showing up and telling them what they had done in their groups. ***C2***

Perhaps it was curiosity; for some, however, it would be further mental stimulation and an opportunity to further "challenge" their current perspective. As participants exhausted the ideas and perspective of their fellow cohort members, keen interest was often expressed to hear what the other cohorts were thinking and how they were progressing.

Each cohort was comprised of people with some common affiliation with the school community; i.e., as a teacher, a parent with a child at the school, a member of the community with no children currently in the school, or a student. Whereas many of the adult participants "wore more than one hat" (e.g., teacher, parent, member of the community), they were reminded to consider their responses and proposals from the perspective of the constituents they represented. There is no doubt that this was very difficult to remember and to adhere to during the dialogue and the adult participants tended to respond from the perspectives of the many roles they fulfill.

4. Trying to identify and break the "habits of mind."

Some participants wondered about whether creative thinking might be unconsciously suppressed by our prevailing perspectives--the "box" that so many cited as a limitation on understanding and enlightenment.

Should we be thinking 'outside the box' more often, if nothing else just to see that we are on the right track using our conventional wisdom? ... We tended to expand mostly on the knowledge management and, indeed, this is what shapes our daily activities, sometimes to the exclusion of creative or visionary thinking ... We develop the 'necessary skills' our children need in the future, based on our own (adult) experiences--do we (however) miss alternative ways of ... fulfilling future roles? ***C1***

Seems we need to be careful not to 'slide' into traditional thinking and jargon ... Seems if we want 'new' stuff, we need to be careful not to use 'traditional/academic' wording/words as they have certain connotations. ***P2***

Chapter VI examines the "transformation of consciousness" that may be alluded to in these participants' musings.

5. Predicting the future and speculating on conditions that our children will face in order to determine the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to develop in order to meet the challenges. Some participants struggled with this, considering that the future is so uncertain and doubted whether the past and present developments are an appropriate foundation for prognostication.

> *I think we struggled and weaved back and forth between projecting what we would like to see in our children's future and what could be best for the child when s/he has to live in that future. This is okay because there always was and will (be) an overlap--or better--a continuum of ideas and values which will be modified by the evolving and new realities and environment ....* ***C1***

6. Appreciating and accommodating other perspectives.

> *It challenges everyone to think further and also to listen more carefully .... building on your own perspective by sharing and communicating, listening, and understanding the others' views.* ***C2***

> It is a one thing to respond to the question "What do I believe or think?", but far more challenging to answer the question "Why do I believe or think that?" The challenge stems from the attempt to objectify one's own biases, prejudices, and limited perspective.

Sometimes, the ideas that seem so clear--common sense to me--are full of holes if examined more closely or if I look at it (from) ... another perspective. ***T1***

I wonder if I'll believe the same things tomorrow .... I often re-think my statements so much I wonder where I began. I learned that my views often coalesced as I spoke .... I am surprised that all the things discussed last lesson--to their fruition, or so I thought--were apparently incomplete today. I'm sure that if I looked at it again next week, there would be many other points to add as well. ***T2***

When you get together a group of people and (you) don't have that deeper understanding of where they're coming from, or have the time to understand their frame of reference like we do in the cohort groups, ... you probably need more time to really understand ... what they really mean. That would ... maybe even challenge another level of development in the vision statement. ***P2***

7. Maintaining the dialogue momentum, focusing on the issue at hand, and remaining mentally alert as perspectives change. The dialogue could sometimes be very intense as participants struggled to understand, and to be understood. In the "spirit of dialogue," participants were encouraged and

"given permission" to press each other for clarification of statements made, to better understand their intent and meaning.

I always feel drained after such a discussion. ***T2***

For some participants, however, it was particularly difficult to become reflective at the outset of a session.

The conversation and where it goes--I find that challenging and really interesting. It's hard when I'm tired and coming here ... after a long day ..., so sometimes that's a little challenging to come dashing in from another meeting and (to) sit down and try and get wrapped around a new subject ... I've had to run after other meetings; so, it's just try(ing) to get rid of the other meeting and get ready for some good conversation. ***C2***

Even though participants had internalized the skills and attitudes that are prerequisite to an effective dialogue, some initially expressed nervousness and reservations. Some of it was related to the level of confidence in their communication skills (see Theme IV).

I think in a dialogue, ... we're ... encouraged to really listen to what the other person is saying and give an example of why you think that ... When you talk in a dialogue, you've got to be pretty sure of what you're saying

.... (T)hat helps me sift through what I really believe ... and you're getting more in depth. ***T1***

Theme II: 'A Stretching of the Mind': The Impact of Participation

A number of participants commented on the impact the dialogue experience had on their personal lives, as a result of the opportunity to: acquire new skills; participate in a stimulating, inspirational, and fun experience; improve relationships with family and friends; apply dialogue skills to other contexts; boost self-esteem and confidence; develop a sense of satisfaction by contributing to the school community; and re-establish one's priorities in life.

1. The acquisition of new skills.

I can see that we all learned from this process how to behave and conduct a democratic meeting with a goal-oriented outcome. ***C1***

(W)e have fun doing it and you start to get sharper in your social skills. ***C1***

You don't have opportunities like this everyday to clarify your thinking on issues ... It's clarifying the issues rather than changing your position ...

(There are) lots of angles to an issue; (you can) ... shape it into something you can then establish (as) a position. ***P2***

About one month ago, I started spending 10 minutes with each of my children, talking before bed. They love doing this and, because of the Project, I can see how this will help them learn to solve problems through dialogue ... I'm going to use the Dialogue Project as a way to bring up/ raising children with a friend of mine who is quite harsh with her children ... (D)iscussing the Project would be a great way to start a discussion. ***P3***

Listen to everybody and never ever just say 'This is my opinion; everybody has to listen to it;' listen to everybody's (opinion) before you make (a) ... decision. ***S4***

The dialogue experience served to impart several changes in the students that became increasingly evident in both the cohort and focus group sessions, and in their journals and interview responses.

a. Their self-confidence in interacting with adults and people in "authority" increased, particularly in the knowledge that every-one was addressing the same topics (and therefore shared the context), that the adults and the researcher/facilitator valued their input, and that their perspectives were critical to the outcome of the Project (after

all, it was about *their* success in life).

b. Their communication skills--speaking and listening--were honed as engaged in dialogue. The adult participants raved about the confidence and eloquence with which the students shared their thoughts in the focus group sessions. In the cohort sessions, the students demonstrated tremendous patience and respect for each other, particularly during those times when individuals would struggle to convey the meaning and intent behind their ideas.

c. The Project took on personal significance as the students began to realize the extent to which they have control over their lives, the need to take some responsibility for the consequences of their actions, and to plan ahead. The Project became more than a "classroom assignment" or the researcher/facilitator's study. They appreciated that the implementation of the Project's "curriculum" (i.e., the KSA's) would clearly have direct impact on their (and their peers') lives.

2. The opportunity to Participate in a stimulating, inspirational, and fun experience.

The participation in this exercise was almost addictive for the reason that it was intellectually challenging--one feels like a human again, which by definition, implies that one uses our brain power. ***C1***

Seeking to understand in a one on one relationship or in a group or about a particular issue has been enlightening .... It sure left a lot of food-for-thought after the meetings and ... even for days afterwards ... , or when I'm at other meetings doing different subjects ... , I think about things we've talked about here. ***C2***

I was fascinated and intrigued by the incredible stimulus of thought that was brought about in my mind while listening to others express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas .... I have always found this kind of experience very engaging, stimulating, important, and worthwhile for my own personal learning process! (It) always impresses me--the power and insights from a group and how much better, deeper, and comprehensive the outcome is ... Multiple 'heads' are always better than one. ***P1***

When I leave, my mind is going a mile a minute because it's exciting, challenging stuff. ***P2***

I think it certainly made us stop and think, about a lot of things. I went away from the meetings all the time, just 'Wow, I never thought of that;' just really opens your mind up. ***P3***

At the end of the sessions, I usually think 'Well, my goodness; I didn't see that one coming. I had no idea that that was where it would go today' ... The thoughts and ideas produced today were once again a stretching of the mind. ***T2***

I honestly thought the meeting would be a little boring, but I actually had a lot of fun. I learned a lot. ***S2***

3. Improving relationships with family and friends.

I like to go home and think about (it) with our kids. The benefit is the opportunity to get together and brainstorm and challenge around ideas that you don't get the opportunities to do usually. And with that comes growth--for yourself and ... for your own education with your kids ... It's good to come to these things because it helps you as a person and you as a family. ***P2***

(V)ery stimulating discussions on the thing that matters most to me--relationships. We're all coming from such diverse backgrounds, ... and yet

we can all understand each other's perspective. (It's about) getting people to sit down and ... being more positive with each other and really trying to look at each other's place and figure out where that person's coming from. ***T1***

4. Applying dialogue skills in other contexts.

I have the opportunity to practice dialogue with colleagues and co-workers from various walks of life ... and it is amazing how refreshing these dialogues are. People feel excited and alive and feel they had a good day at work. ***C1***

5. Boosting self-esteem and confidence.

Having someone know they have been heard and understood makes them feel great and me feel better. ***C2***

(I)t just gives you a warm, fuzzy feeling to be able to take part in it. ***C3***

As for the student-participants, the opportunity to engage with adults on an "equal footing" was an experience that they appreciated. One participant perhaps best summarizes the feelings of the other members of the student cohort.

The adults actually listened to you and they thought what you thought ... ; it was really fun. I (felt) ... special. ***S2***

6. A sense of satisfaction from contributing to the school community.

I would say it is worthwhile doing it, partly because you get to be more part of the school community ... I think it's important to have your say in what's going on and it makes you feel good to be part of it. ***P3***

You feel like you're contributing something to our school and contributing something to the community. ***S2***

It makes me feel good, like you've done something good ... for the community. ***S2***

I am glad that the kids get to have their say (on) ... things. ***S4***

7. An opportunity to re-establish one's priorities in life.

It is a most useful exercise for everyone to at least once in a lifetime--hopefully not on the last day--to draw up a diagram of all the things one does or 'should do' in this complex society. It is necessary in order to gauge where one's efforts should be and to see where one wants to be. It

also crystallizes out the options for further engagement or disengagement so one can make a lifestyle adjustment. ***C1***

One thing that stuck in my mind ... was the discussion we had about time; time for family, friends ... I haven't been home as much as I should ... and this discussion sure made the guilt surface .... This discussion gave me plenty to think about after I left. ***C2***

The thing that really stood out was the visual (on the myriad roles adults have) of how complicated our lives can be. (It) confirmed why there are not enough hours in a day. It reinforces why parents can't get out to school council meetings or the community (can't) find time for public input meetings--it's just (our) complicated lives and finding time. ***C2***

Promoting personal well-being is ... a first step and an essential key to attaining success in all of the other challenges that our children will face in their futures. ***P1***

Theme III: 'Kids ... As Partners': Children and Adults In Dialogue

The second and third focus group sessions provided the opportunity for all participants to engage in dialogue. Afterwards, the adult-participants marveled at the skills and attitudes that the students manifested in their behavior and comments.

I think ... the students really grasped what it was about and they had an amazing depth of understanding of the topics, spent a lot of thought on it; they could express themselves well, and I think they also knew the ... meaning. In other words, they were the master of the language, in a way--they could really use that to communicate properly. The other thing (is), they felt quite sure of themselves because of that; they were confident. They had absolutely no problem communicating with us; they were not intimidated or flabbergasted or anything, when statements were made or if there was a slip of vocabulary ... They learned during that process (that) 'I can do this. All I have to do is think, use my brain.' ***C1***

I guess it was the kids (that surprised me); they remained kids but they discussed it at an adult level ... with the skills and the determination and expression that you expect from older children ... You view them differently, you know; more as partners rather than (in) a hierarchy. ***C1***

When we met with the whole group (at the focus group session), ... those kids just blew me away ... Those students just were incredible, and just the level that some of them can work at really ... impressed me a lot ... I didn't sense too much uncomfortableness with (the students) ... which was great because they were in a room full of adults ... The level of their communication skills and their writing--that really did impress me. ***C2***

(The focus group session) was an eye-opener in that the (students) ... ,that were working with the group that I was in, ... had so many ways of explaining the same thing; and just that they worked with us to get the words proper ... I felt so good just being there and being able to interact with them ... The kids were just wonderful; ... I think they were more adult than some of the adults (in that) they were focused on what was going on rather than telling their stories ... ,you know how we digress. ***C3***

The kids--the children--in ... grade 6 ... that are involved in this have just been excellent. The contacts that I have had with them in our discussion have been just awesome and I think it's ... worthwhile having them a part of it all ... I think it was a really big learning experience for the grown-ups--to have to try and speak at a level that they can really grasp what it is we're really trying to talk about. That took some work and having to go back and say 'Okay; does that work? Do you think a grade 4 (student) would understand that word?' ... I think (the kids) ... did super and they were so forthcoming when we'd ask them; they would answer and .... give us their honest ... impressions. ***P1***

After engaging with the students in dialogue during the two focus group sessions, and reviewing their contribution to the "product," many of the adult-participants expressed newfound respect for the integrity and intelligence of young people and called for their increased involvement in decision-making, particularly in areas that affect them directly, including education.

Although children have us doubt their own visions for their future; they do not have the benefit of hindsight or insight and, therefore, it must be a collective or communal effort ... The child's vision also needs buy-in from adults. ***C1***

I kind of anticipated that having the children involved would be very important and ... I've been totally convinced of that ... They have to be involved and ... we have to be able to listen more to them and not brush kids off like we still tend to do as adults. ***P1***

I wasn't expecting the students to be as forthcoming with their opinions and feelings as they obviously were! Their honest and earnest participation made this whole meeting feel very worthwhile, as it is their future we are debating, and I believe their involvement to be essential and crucial. ***P1***

We need to listen to the children more and not have such tunnel vision ... the children are where it's at. (I realize) that more so now than before. ***C3***

Theme IV: 'Holding One's Own': Taking Risks In Dialogue

For participants, involvement with the Project was a somewhat risky proposition. The experience was likely discomforting and frustrating at times and the time commitment was no doubt onerous (and likely interfered with other commitments and impinged on personal lives). Some participants may have felt compelled to continue with

their participation since the low numbers in each cohort would mean that the cohort's work would be in jeopardy should anyone leave prior to completion. There was also the risk of feeling embarrassed by making seemingly naive statements or errors in judgment or interpretation. Since all Project participants were members of the Community and likely would have further contact after the Project, reputations were 'on the line.'

At the outset of the Project, many participants expressed varying degrees of nervousness and self-consciousness. Some were unclear as to the nature of the dialogue process, others felt somewhat intimidated by the confidence and highly-developed communication skills that others displayed, and others felt that they were perhaps not qualified to represent a large stakeholder constituency.

> *At the beginning I told you that I ... wasn't a good candidate for this because I'm not one who can quickly think up an idea and express themselves ... ; but the fact that I think that I hold my own in some of those discussions, half surprised me ... At first, I couldn't formulate my thoughts, opinions; but as (others) ... 'pushed' me, it became easier to not only express but also (to) feel confident that I could disagree ... and my opinions still had value.* ***T1***

> *Little awkward at the beginning, being the 'guy' (only male) participant (in the cohort). Have to be aware of the stereotypes and barriers of communicating in this environment.* ***P2***

I must confess to a little nervousness, seeing who else is involved. ***T1***

(When) I wasn't with the other kids (in the focus group session), ... that was kind of scary because they (i.e., the adults) always looked at me and asked me ... 'Is that OK? Is that all right?' It made me feel like I was the boss ... At first, I was nervous when they ... all started throwing out this stuff all at me, but then after a while I got used to it ... I thought it was kind of challenging but fun. ***S1***

Some adult participants expressed a little sheepishness, that perhaps they had offered too much input in the sessions.

I feel a bit uncomfortable that I have offered too many suggestions. On the other hand, there was good input from everyone and certainly no problem with agreeing or disagreeing. ***C1***

I guess I was pretty vocal about this issue and it may have impacted (on) the discussion some. ***P2***

Theme V: 'Getting the Right Comfort Level': Creating the Dialogue Culture

In a short period of time, each group developed a culture in that everyone internalized certain behavioral expectations, closely related to the "protocols." Not once did I as the dialogue facilitator have to remind anyone of those rules. This may have

been a factor of the small size of each group, which was conducive to a rather intimate setting with everyone sitting in very close proximity to each other. Body language was very interesting to observe; e.g., individuals would at times lean on to the table, with elbows resting and hands clasped; sometimes a person would lean back in his/her chair as if to remove themselves momentarily from the exchange. Most people would situate themselves at the table in order to face the other participants, while maintaining line of sight to the screen. The screen itself became a place on which to focus one's gaze, thereby avoiding eye contact with others as a person "digested" what was just said, composed one's thoughts, or simply needed a rest. Participants assumed the same places at the table for every session; perhaps unconsciously it made everyone feel more comfortable and secure since the distance between each personality at the table had been set and was respected. The seating arrangement may have also contributed to a sense of predictability and order as people became used to their place in relation to the other cohort members.

According to Gadamer (1988), "there can be no speech that does not bind the speaker and the person spoken to." (p. 359) There appeared to be a conscious effort for participants to choose their words, and the manner in which they were expressed, carefully to avoid any conflict or inadvertent slight. Not once were voices raised in anger or frustration during any cohort session, even though there were times when participants may have disagreed; those differences were reconciled with further dialogue as each party purposefully sought to understand the other's meaning and intent and to move to a common meaning.

Participants would usually attend the sessions on time. Once all had arrived, everyone seemed anxious to get started. In fact, there were no breaks taken during any cohort session despite the offer to do so at every meeting. Perhaps people were anxious to progress or did not want to lose the momentum of the dialogue. There was little time taken to "chat" or "to make conversation" before starting or afterwards. Perhaps no one wanted to become too familiar with the others; the basis of their relationship (i.e., to engage in dialogue on the key questions) had been established and no one wanted to expand or interfere in it. Seldom did members loiter in the room after the sessions, likely because of other commitments but perhaps to protect the relationships that they had created. This phenomenon may be related to what Bohm (1996) refers to as "impersonal fellowship."

The relationship among participants was critical to the Project's success. The challenge of bringing together a diverse group of strangers (in most cases) and to expect them to set aside issues of ego, status, gender, and age seemed daunting. Perhaps the success of the Project in this area can be ascribed to the nature of these particular personalities (they were all kind, thoughtful and friendly) as well as to their conscious effort to respect each other as equals and to dignify everyone's views. From the outset, participants were mindful of the culture that was developing in the cohort sessions.

> *The first challenge is always getting to know the people in the group and getting a comfort level where you feel okay to express your opinions ... so if you're having a disagreement, you want to make sure that, at the end, ... it's okay and*

comfortable to debate .... It is interesting to note the increasing ease with which this group communicates--having developed a degree of trust, which allows (us) to offer opinions and to listen to other views without judging each other. ***C1***

There is a huge comfort level with this group, to discuss ideas in a safe environment. Digging deeper on a subject with this group becomes second-nature. ***C2***

I felt like everybody seemed to be able to discuss and say what ... (he/she) wanted. Nobody was impolite or rude about hearing other people's thoughts or feelings. I felt like my ideas were respected. ***P1***

In our group, ... every once in a while, you ... (have) to be careful that your disagreement or other way of wording something, is taken (in such a way that)..everybody feels okay with what was said ... It's not healthy to move ahead unless everyone is ... okay with what we're doing. ***P2***

I think the more informal conversational style gives people the opportunity or the comfort level to express themselves in a better way, a safer way. ***P2***

You get to talk with the same people in a completely different way than you're used to speaking with them. You get to learn new sides about that other person. ***T2***

(A challenge is) when the groups don't meet together as often, and don't know each other that well, (because) meaningful progress requires ... debate and the comfort level where you can say 'I totally disagree' and have it out a little more ... It depends (on) who's in the room and how their comfort level is ... You can lay (out) ... the ground rules but that's only as good as people('s) ... comfort level ... with the group. ***P2***

One participant cautioned that a culture of mutual respect and patience, that may be requisite to an effective dialogue, might adversely affect the introspection/reflection process and undermine the group's efforts to extend their perspective.

You take our group for instance; how many times have the ... participants challenged what was on the screen? maybe, I think, once--one person did once. Is it a comfort-level thing? Is it just accepting what's typed up there? Is it challenging (the facilitator)--because maybe it's not perceived that way--but ... for what reason have they not challenged what was typed up there very often? ... It really comes down to the comfort level with themselves to challenge, in front of a group, someone else's ideas or interpretation of what was just said ... As we get to know each other, over time, the group can move to a deeper level quicker because of the common understanding of 'where others are at' or their 'frame of reference.' ***P2***

(G)roup dynamics are important to the pace, comfort, openness of group to move forward. For example, when the plenary ... group got together, people were more polite, less willing to challenge, etc. Perhaps this is because they did not know each other as well. ***P2***

The focus group sessions presented some interesting challenges; whereas cohort members were able to establish the desirable and effective relationships that are conducive to a dialogue through their frequent sessions, the occasions on which all participants were brought together in a focus group were few. It was expected and hoped that the culture that had been created in the cohort groups, as well as the skills and attitudes relating to the dialogue experience, would be evident in the focus group sessions. There was therefore some initial nervousness on the part of most participants who so wanted the focus group sessions to be successful. The results, however, exceeded everyone's expectations.

At first, I didn't know who was going to be there, and then once I got there and we got into groups (at the focus group session) ... I was really comfortable ... And (they) ... listened to us ... ; we didn't feel like you were outnumbered or anything. ***S4***

(At the focus group session) everyone seemed so comfortable with each other immediately; it didn't matter which group you were in ... It was like they hadn't been working apart the whole time because everyone just came together ... An

expectation was set--'You're working with these people,' it would be easy to work with them, and dialogue was easy. ***C2***

Working on the Project over the year has made us comfortable with discussing these topics--even with some people we don't know very well. ***P3***

We could thoroughly and deeply discuss the attitudes, knowledge, and skills on this paper today because today we felt safe in expressing our opinions--we now have a relationship with these people. ***T1***

I had a good time today because I got to interact with teachers, parents, community members, and other students. ***S3***

The ease with which the Project participants were able to engage in the focus groups may be evidence of their newfound skills and attitudes that had developed as a result of the dialogue in the cohort sessions. The spirit of dialogue had perhaps become second nature. This was a critical development since it may indicate that participants in a dialogue session need not have to be very familiar with each other, as long as everyone is clear about the process and context of the session at the outset.

Theme VI: 'This Is Ours': A Sense of Ownership of the Product

As the scope of participants' commitment--of time and effort--to the Project became evident to all and as the Project approached the end, participants expressed a sense of satisfaction or pride--even ownership--over the final document.

> *It's stimulating, it's important, and I get an increasing sense of commitment that we're going to do something with this.* ***P2***

> *When the final document was handed out, summarizing everything, one feels ownership in what it says. (T)his document is ours. We can take ownership of it. It has our original ideas that have been honed, challenged, and defended.* ***T1***

There is little doubt that all participants will be anxious to see how the Community School Council and community respond to the document and what the outcomes of those deliberations will be.

Theme VII: 'Carrying These Ideas Forward': Sustaining Dialogue

As the Project ensued, it became easier for participants to engage from the outset of each session. Perhaps it stemmed from a desire to "get things done," an enthusiasm to "get into it," or a sense of obligation to the others; regardless, there was little idle conversation as we convened, as people took full advantage of the time available to

engage in dialogue. Interestingly, even when there were long intervals between sessions for some cohorts (i.e., three to five weeks), participants appeared eager to re-engage in dialogue and had no apparent difficulty carrying on where they had left off.

I wondered, however, what would happen once the Project had ended. How long would participants be able to sustain their newfound skills and meta-cognition? Would they revert to old "habits of mind" or would there be some permanent, or at least long-term transformation of consciousness that would impact their thinking process and behaviors? A couple of the participants alluded to this concern.

> *An ongoing 'support' group or mastermind group to continue carrying these ideas forward on a personal level would be great.* ***P2***

> *If we weren't discussing these topics monthly, then we may let our practice of (of dialogue skills) slide.* ***P3***

Theme VIII: 'Finding Common Ground': Creating Consensus

The Project had a pre-defined outcome of creating a vision of education for Community School, a "blueprint" of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (the KSA's) which children attending the school would need to acquire in order to be successful (now and in the future), and the identification of the educational opportunities that would engender these KSA's. The identification of this purpose gave the participants a

reference point in terms of the decision to participate. An open-ended, non-prescriptive focus would likely not have generated much interest and certainly would have had a significant impact on the dialogue process.

Despite the rather narrow focus, it quickly became apparent to participants that the topic had a myriad of related issues. We began by establishing the context of the exercise, the so-called "big picture" of a desirable future for the children of the Community (see Appendix K). A number of key questions were identified (see Appendix I) which would lead us from this point to the details of specific educational opportunities that the community could offer to provide children with the desired KSA's that would hopefully fulfill the desirable future.

Once the descriptors of a desirable future were established, through a negotiation process at the first focus group session, the cohort groups were asked to identify the future roles that children would have to fulfill as adults. For each role, KSA's were identified. As the Project progressed, some KSA's were identified as critical, owing to the fact that they were repeatedly identified as each role was examined.

> *(W)e hit on some of the same skills which have been identified in earlier discussions. This seems to be an important development in this dialogue as it seems to focus us on some important points which may be in the end areas worthwhile addressing .... Again, many important concepts are cropping up again, pointing out their potential value in a final vision.* ***C1***

I found a sense of 'deja vu' in the words, thoughts from other meetings come into play over again ... It seems to me that maybe these are the issues that need to be addressed and are the focus of what is needed. ***C3***

Many of the skills and attitudes tended to repeat themselves from role to role .... To me it appears that a good basic set of skills and attitudes in our children will serve them well in many different roles now and in the future. ***P1***

An interesting phenomenon, that quickly became apparent to some participants, was the ease with which cohort members (and, in the focus group sessions, all cohorts) were able to reach consensus on some points. There are several possible explanations for this.

1. Participants consciously or unconsciously were trying to create a sense of unanimity; i.e., individuals may have been loathe to debate the meaning and appropriateness of concluding statements for fear that it would create dissension or bad feelings in the group.

2. The dialogue that ensued, once an initial idea had been presented, had the purpose of determining the most accurate and appropriate wording. Perhaps the participants had in effect fathomed all their personal perspectives to the point that they all felt confident and certain that the statement was the "best" possible expression of the group's intent and meaning.

3. Participants were mindful of the time constraints; they knew at the outset the extent of their "mission" and realized that there had to be a limit on the discussion or debate on each particular point if they hoped to complete their tasks.

4. Unconsciously, "group think" had prevailed which served to subvert individual thinking.

The discussion was excellent and surprisingly unanimous. There is an amazing, although not surprising, uniformity in the way the 'team' is thinking. This makes the dialogue easier and easier and gives comfort to our interactions and tolerance of opinions ... It is fascinating that there is now a picture emerging from an initially almost overwhelmingly complex process. ***C1***

It feels that the ideas that we come up with are quite universal. ***T2***

This phenomenon was remarkably manifest in the focus group sessions, even between the adult and student participants, and was apparent to some participants.

I think we found a common ground very quickly or in a form to communicate with the students. ***C1***

I was amazed how the statements from the cohort groups came together. ***C2***

It seemed (that) amazingly similar thoughts, concerns were shared by the student group and older group. It was amazing to me that the student group had thought as much as we ... about their future and possible routes, means to make a comfortable future for themselves and their peers. ***C3***

Two participants expressed some concern with the rather easy process of reaching consensus.

With such a consensus, it is tempting to assume that we were on the right track in our vision. ***C1***

(I wondered about) how all the thoughts (of all of) our cohorts would be amalgamated together or if all the original thinking would still be 'pure.' ***P2***

Theme IX: 'The Keys to Success': The Importance of Attitude

Initially, the key questions that guided the dialogue were intended to lead to the identification of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that children would need to acquire in order to be successful in meeting the challenges and in fulfilling the various roles in the future. As the dialogue ensued, however, it became apparent to the participants that the most critical attributes were attitudes. Although the

Project participants did not define this term, assuming that everyone shared the same connotation of the concept, for the purposes of this Project the term "attitude" is defined as "a deliberately adopted or habitual mode of though regarding a situation or object." Knowledge outcomes were not even included in the final document as participants concluded that the "information explosion" and the ease of access to information via the Internet would render any knowledge outcomes identified antiquated. Whereas the identification of prerequisite skills was a key component of the final document, it became quite apparent that the development of certain attitudes was most critical to children's future success.

Although in the beginning I thought we (would) end up with more of a collection of 'things' that students ought to have knowledge of in order to fulfill their adulthood requirements, it became quickly clear (that) what we identified were character peculiarities--attitudes. It almost seems simple to realize that, with the right attitude, one can accomplish almost anything--and this is exactly what brings people to where they are today. It incorporates societal as well as personal values, and will serve well to overcome adversities. How do we develop attitudes in our children? This must be a comprehensive, multi-partnership approach in which the schooling system plays a major role. If we are able to identify and put into words and writing those attitudes, surely there must be a way that others can do the same. ***C1***

One thing that I heard that stuck in my mind was that our future attitudes are seemingly more important than our skills and knowledge .... (T)he keys to success ... seem to be our attitudes ... (I)t will only be through our attitudes that we can ensure our enjoyable future. Encouraging and guiding our students to internalize healthy and positive attitudes will ensure success for them. **T2**

Chapter VI

Participants' Transformational Learning

The potential of the dialogue process to engage participants in critical reflection was at the heart of this research. The dialogue process was intended to stimulate among its participants (individually and collectively) transformational learning or a *transformation of consciousness*; i.e., a shift in the way one perceives reality, creating a newfound awareness of one's own process of "making meaning," and making one more tolerant and receptive to new ideas and perspectives that are encountered from time to time. Potentially, this transformation fosters creativity and authenticity in one's life. It would be impossible to guarantee or to predict who would experience a "transformation of consciousness" and whether evidence of it could be discerned. Since the transformation is a personal experience, it would be up to participants to determine whether they had indeed experienced a transformation of consciousness and to articulate it. The feedback from participants in their journals and interview responses on this aspect of the dialogue experience provided valuable insight into this phenomenon and indicate that, to varying degrees, participants did experience transformational learning. The purpose of this research was not to report on the perspective shift experienced by *individual* participants but to determine the effect of the dialogue experience on participants *collectively*; however, since the testimonials cited can be ascribed to individuals using the codes, it is evident that some participants experienced higher levels of transformational learning than did others (or at least were able and willing to articulate

it in more detail). An analysis of the participants' comments identified six aspects of the group's transformational learning experience.

1. An Expanded Perspective.

> *(I)t's really just a more enlightened way of doing it, no matter how painful it is in the beginning; it becomes more fun and ... you have a much wider view, not so much influenced by maybe a certain person or interest group.* ***C1***

> *(B)y bouncing ideas off of people, I think that it gets you outside your own mindset and your experiences and (you) get to talk to a wider group; ... just something (that) someone else will say can make you definitely rethink something you might have thought initially ... and build from there ... I found out a lot and spent it on my listening and the global picture, and getting big picture ideas and focusing them down to what it looks like.* ***C2***

> *This Project for me has enabled me to further the process of 'thinking outside the box' .... My thinking has been that the majority of persons have 'tunnel vision' and are not consciously able to see beyond the end of their noses. If there is some way of training/educating (these) ways of communicating/thinking/ listening, to open the 'box/tunnel' and creating a vision of what could be, at an early age ...* ***C3***

The Community School Dialogue Project has opened my mind and eyes further to the endlessness of perspectives and therefore, and consequently, the possibilities/opportunities that will stem from them ... My arrogance of thinking that I might know a lot has been tempered significantly by my involvement and learning ... I realize that no topic, issue, or ideas is ever really complete. All subjects discussed need to remain open for additions, changes, and general discussion. ***P1***

I never expected the Dialogue Project to have an impact on my life and I was very surprised to see that it has. This is difficult to put into words, but meeting ... (the others in my cohort group) has made me realize that I have a very narrow circle of friends--that there are people who are incredibly interesting and intelligent that I would enjoy being with. ***P3***

Once again, the cohort meeting has reminded me to set priorities and not to back down from what's important to me. ***P3***

(N)ow, when I hear others complain, I use these skills of dialogue to put things more in perspective and try not to judge others. I try to expand my thinking and it makes me feel more calm and at peace with my place in this world and my priorities. ***T1***

I have 20/20 tunnel vision. It really has boiled down to perspectives for me. That has been the re-occurring theme throughout this Project ....: We need to make more of an effort to see through other eyes. ***T2***

I learned that children have a lot to face while we're still young. ***S1***

I notice how the school is run a little bit more. I never even thought ... about how the school is run. ***S2***

I learned that adults have many roles in the world. ***S3***

I changed my mind about our school, and how education can be so expensive. ***S4***

Sharing ideas with others made me think about (what) all the other kids think. ***S4***

Education starts now and homework's important to be done ... if you want to get into university. ***S4***

2. An awareness of the potential of an expanded perspective and its impact on lifestyle and behavior.

Perception is not reality, any more than a fact can be a truth guaranteed to last forever. This is at the crux of a student becoming a critical thinker --that other options exist and that as our world changes--as it will always --we must be ready to adapt to that change. ***T2***

Looking at all those ideas makes me wonder if we could ever change the world while we are still kids. ***S1***

I learned that children have a big future ahead of them. We should not take advantage of our world. ***S1***

I thought differently about a lot of stuff ... like parenting; I thought totally differently than now; I actually know how parents actually feel, so I've gone much easier on my mom. ***S1***

I thought school was so boring, ...'Why do we have it?' After doing the dialogue project, I thought 'Well, it's not as boring' and 'It's not as stupid' and ... it's worth something; because like when we went over the jobs and (determined that) ... you need a good education, it made me straighten up. ***S1***

I learned that there are many different ideas that I wouldn't think of. I discovered that there will be many more challenges than I expected and I

know that I should prepare myself for the future ... I think the Dialogue Project will make me think more about my problems, not just finding the quickest answer. ***S3***

(I) learned not to be as shy like when we're working with teachers and stuff. I've learned that different people have different ways of looking and ... like some people thought of stuff that I would never have thought of. ***S3***

Well, I've learned to think ahead a lot more about what I'll be facing in my adult years; ... like I never really thought of what job I wanted ... but now it's like ... I've been thinking ahead and planning; I've set aside like a 2% money (savings) thing. ***S3***

I changed my mind about (how) all kids can be themselves without (facing) consequences. ***S3***

Today, it helped me talk about my thoughts and what I think should change in my life! ... It sort of helped me think that I can make a difference. ***S4***

Like my best friend, ... we used to like talk on the phone all the time, but now we're actually getting together more and making sure that our homework is done; just because when we talk about ... how important our

education is, well once you think about it, you realize that it ... starts now, not later. ***S4***

I was stimulated to the point that 'yes,' maybe the educating, encouraging, and preparation of children, with input from all aspects of society, can help to change the world for the better. ***C3***

I think what I found myself doing continually, throughout the discussion, was to scour my thoughts for ideas and ways in which I and other parents could teach and lead our children to gain the necessary KSA's for competing successfully ... ***P1***

This exercise is helping me and us as this progresses, as a couple, to re-evaluate what the priority values and directions are for our kids and, I think, now that we're talking about it more, that's probably an important outcome. ***P2***

3. Enhanced meta-cognition (i.e., self-awareness of one's thought processes and how one interprets reality).

I sure am revealing a lot about myself, if only to myself ... It's probably helped me to better identify the opinions that I already have and to consider things that I hadn't considered before; I have a clearer idea of

what I think and I have a clearer idea of what other people think as well. ***T2***

Sharing ideas with others helps me to challenge my thoughts and feelings by hearing others' thoughts and feelings. It aids me in rounding out my own philosophy and thoughts about different issues .... (T)his dialogue ... appears to stimulate and maximize my thought processes while learning and sharing others' views ... For me, it will remain an important experience/life lesson in how to listen and how to approach the world. I realize that I, personally, can never go back or revert totally to my past ways of experiencing and interacting with the world. ***P1***

During the dialogue process, I experienced increasing awareness of expanding peripheral vision and thinking. I always sought to expand my horizon but this process does it or helps me do it on a more conscious level. The opportunity for this expansion did ... come from ... interaction with fellow cohort members. ***C1***

I'm certainly more conscious of the thought process ... my own ... how I approach things and how I think about things .... It's just that I find it ... I shouldn't say comforting, but I'm more conscious of the problem; how I've derived at it .... When you think about something and I think that either slowed it down or gave it more emphasis to the extent ... We did this in a

slow way ... and I adopted that to the way I would think about things ... I am more methodical. ***C1***

'(T)hinking outside the box' ... is such a difficult skill to learn and to be successful at, when all of us think from within a 'box.' ***P1***

I was thinking perhaps ... I didn't want to look at negative things but what it actually is is that I prefer not to look at the future in a negative way or to even consider negative 'what ifs.' ***P3***

I've already noticed an impact this Project has made on my way of thinking. Before, I often thought 'What is the point to examining everything?' and now it makes more sense. It's actually helping me ... because I understand even better now how everything has an impact on everything else, how it's important to have background knowledge ... Here's something I've just learned about myself--as a result of this Project--I need time to reflect after a discussion--to be able to comment on what was discussed, I need to mull it over. That never occurred to me before. ***P3***

My mind is 'boggled!' There have been so many ideas expressed today that have stretched my way of thinking. 'What is truth? What is fact?' It must be based on individual perception, life experiences; that even what we see

cannot be declared (as) fact. It is also changing as we gain more life experiences, information .... Are the values I hold most dear subject to change? ***T1***

I have already been wondering about a few incidents that have come up (since we began) and I wonder if it was this Project that has made me see certain things in a different light. ***T1***

I learned a lot about people .... I learned to think about what I say before saying it .... Yes, I think about my actions from now on and my words. ***S1***

Sharing ideas with others helped me to be more open and think out of the box ... I am not sure if I will ever go back to the same as I was before September 29 (when the Project began). ***S2***

4. Affirmation of self.

I think over the period of time that we were doing this, I felt a reinforcement, myself, of some of (my) ... techniques and attitudes of communication ... and it helps me. Maybe, I've done it but not to the extent and not as consciously as I do now. ***C1***

I have also received affirmation that many of the strategies that I use in parenting are urging my kids in the 'right' direction and are beneficial in helping to prepare them for their future. This affirmation is a confidence-builder for me. ***P1***

It allows me to solidify exactly what I think ... and when I have that kind of input, ... that's a good feeling and still ... I really enjoy listening to other people and getting their ideas and then it helps me kind of filter through what I truly believe. ***T1***

I find myself more talking to different people than just sitting out and not participating in classes ... Now I find myself raising my hand more ... 'cause everybody has a different opinion than yours, so you have to listen to everybody else's opinion, too. ***S4***

5. Reinforcement of existing values and positions.

One of the benefits for myself as ... reaffirming myself on education, ... that children are our best source of what is needed. ***C3***

The way I think now was strongly supported and reinforced by ... the discussion and only furthers my strong belief in community involvement

and service for the benefit of he entire society! All individuals must take on that responsibility as a personal, lifelong commitment! ***P1***

I found these cohort meetings very educational personally, in helping me to consolidate and round out my philosophies on children's futures and he necessity and importance of certain attitudes and skills. ***P1***

This (discussion) helped me confirm my belief that, as parents, we know what's right for our children and we shouldn't 'go with the flow.' ***P3***

I think that it's just made me stronger in my own beliefs ... It's reinforced a lot of my ideas ... Bottom line, we all kind of believe the same thing and I have a lot of the same beliefs ... It's kind of ... cemented what I ... already believed. ***T1***

6. Enhanced introspective and empathetic skills.

This whole dialogue exercise has somewhat modified my discussion behavior in that I am more intent to understand exactly someone else's viewpoint, or ask questions for clarification before I formulate a reply ... I am now more conscious of what it is that I have been doing for a long time and I can more purposefully engage family or friends in conversation which often leads to most interesting dialogues ... (M)any times when I

really applied that (process); when somebody just babbles along--and you can now catch yourself drifting off and force yourself to listen ... and also steering other people in that direction comes more easily ... (Y)ou do it more on a conscious level--you listen to people differently, you listen to what they say differently, and I think anybody talking to us (involved in this Project) probably will have a difficult time just 'wishy-washing' around ... I carry it on to my professional life and maybe even at home to some extent; but there, at work, I make an effort ... (with people), forcing them into the process by always asking questions back ... It helps tremendously to get them to think ... They're not bothered by the process. I think it's a process that enlightens people ... I think asking (for) details shows interest ... (and) I think they like that. ***C1***

I hope to keep practicing listening, understanding and to 'allow the light in.' ... I think it's helped ... me practice just the listening aspect ... I'm remembering more without actually writing it down, which is big for me, because the conversation seems to stay in my memory a lot longer. ***C2***

It's made me listen rather than formulating my opinion and jumping in. I think that I've managed not to butt in so much. (It takes) better listening skills and really trying to interpret what's been said rather than formulating your own idea of what's been said. ***C3***

It reinforces the importance of listening ... It's not necessarily different opinions; they're just coming from a different life-set and different frame of reference and they all got to come together ... The other groups have pointed out things like 'Wow! I would never have thought of that.' ***P2***

I think probably I'm more conscious of trying to listen ... So now, when I'm just having a conversation with somebody, I consciously tell myself to listen carefully, don't jump in and start thinking on what you're about to say next, hear what the whole thing ... they have to say ... In the course of our group's dialogue, I continued to appreciate the importance of shared opinions, listening, and mutual respect for each other's opinions ... I learned, yet again, how important it is to be a good listener and how difficult it is a skill to learn and do proper justice to ... All of our knowledge about the world hinges on our ability to do this. ***P1***

I internalize the difference between 'dialogue' and just conversation. Something I will carry into the future by mak(ing) conscious observation of this ... It always slows you down and reminds you to just ... sit back for a minute and listen; so, it always reminds me to listen better. ***P2***

(F)or myself, listening has become a better 'habit' because of the project. I really listen to people without thinking about what I'll say next ... Now I'm so aware of it especially ... when people start talking over top of

people. And I think 'Nobody's listening--everybody just wanting to say their piece,' ... thinking what they're going to say while the other person is still talking. And I try really hard not to do that; I've gotten much better at just listening. For me that's good ... (I) seem to have let that ability slide. ***P3***

I am using the dialogue skills again to put a priority on what now is so obviously clear to me. I can also use the skills that we've discussed here to be a support--a caring, listening 'ear' to my friends. ***T1***

I choose my words more differently going through this experience; more about what I'm saying; they're just longer words, different than I usually speak ... I think about if it is going to hurt the person, ... make them happy, ... put a smile on their face ... and even I tell my friends like they shouldn't be so mean to people. ***S1***

I guess I listen a little bit more; well, I hear what people have to say instead of interrupting like I used to do ... I think I became more open, sharing with everyone else. ***S2***

I felt I listen better now and I don't ... talk as shyly as before ... I learned that, to be a good listener, I heard other people's ideas/opinions. ***S3***

Chapter VII

The Project Summary - Basis For Reform

The "curriculum" that the Project participants created and included in Appendix L is significant when one considers how different it is from the mandate of public education in its current manifestation (see Appendix A for a list of the Goals of Education in Alberta). It is also apparent that the current educational program in Kindergarten to Grade 12 does *not* address the desired outcomes identified by the Project participants, not *intentionally*. Even though the role of creating the opportunities for children to develop the desirable attitudes and skills is one that is shared by all stakeholders, the implications for public education are far-reaching. It certainly calls for a re-evaluation of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the program of studies, the school curriculum and organization, and the teacher-student relationship in learning, in inculcating the desired attitudes and skills in our children.

In this chapter, I will comment on the significance of the Project findings and their implications in relation to the desirable future for our children, their future challenges, and the attitudes and skills they need in order to achieve the desired future and to meet challenges they will face. The sections in this chapter relate to the data included in Appendices J, K, and L and are labeled *Challenges and Roles That Children Will Face As Adults (Appendix J)*, *Vision Statements On a Desirable Future For Our Children (Appendix K)*, and *The Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KSA's) of Success (Appendix L)*.

Challenges and Roles That Children Will Face As Adults (Appendix J)

The data, summarized in Appendix J: The Synopsis of Cohort Statements, identify the challenges that the participants envisioned that our children will face in terms of achieving the desirable future (described in Appendix K) and the roles they will have to fulfill as adults. Each cohort's contribution is delineated by the code found to the immediate left of each statement (i.e., the italicized, bold letters before each statement denotes the cohorts from whose dialogue the statement emanated; i.e., ***c*** = community cohort; ***p*** = parent cohort; ***s*** = student cohort; ***t*** = teacher cohort). I created the category titles as a means of organizing the disparate statements that the cohort members had produced; what was most important to the Project, however, was that the all or at least most of challenges and roles envisioned would be effectively met through the acquisition of the skills and attitudes that participants identified as prerequisite for success. It is accurate to say that the challenges identified simply represent those that came to mind to cohort members during their deliberations. It is interesting, however, to identify the future challenges and roles on which all or some of the cohorts focused and agreed upon, and to speculate on the reasons for their choices.

1. Although all cohorts highlighted the importance of family relationships, education, and financial security, the student cohort emphasized the roles of family member and breadwinner and identified a number of skills and attitudes that relate to a stable, secure family life. These included the promotion of positive values and financial security. Curiously, they spent

considerable time discussing the challenges of parenting in relation to the discipline of children! The students also put a high premium on freedom and independence, focusing on the challenges of finding a fulfilling and secure career and moving out of home (Interesting this latter challenge was also an area of focus for the parent cohort!).

2. All cohorts emphasized the importance of personal security and the creation of a peaceful world, no doubt as the result of the events of September 11, 2001 (the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York) which was on everyone's mind for the subsequent dialogue sessions.

3. All cohorts emphasized the importance of developing and maintaining positive and fulfilling relationships with family, friends, and community.

4. The parent cohort identified a number of challenges related to maintaining hope and taking action in/contributing to the creation of a better world. Although no other cohort had considered this, these challenges were addressed when the group identified the KSA's for future success.

5. The community and parent cohorts identified challenges that relate to the "information explosion" in terms of remaining current and using the information to one's advantage.

6. The student, community, and teacher cohorts identified the challenges of caring for an aging population, in terms of the burden for families and on health care and housing.

7. All cohorts emphasized the importance of maintaining personal health and well-being, highlighting it as a priority.

8. The student, parent, and teacher cohorts agreed that the role of leader and role model (in the family and community) would present particular challenges to this generation of children.

9. The responsibilities that accrue to members of a community in terms of citizenship and volunteerism were a priority for all cohorts.

10. The importance of taking advantage of and seeking educational opportunities for future success was also acknowledged by all cohort members.

11. All cohorts acknowledged the roles of consumer and participant in the economy (as employer, employee, and entrepreneur) as meriting the acquisition of prerequisite skills and attitudes.

12. The parent and teacher cohorts made reference to the spiritual dimension of

life and the challenges that it presents.

13. The community cohort addressed the need to promote creativity.

14. Both the community and teacher cohorts reflected on the need for children to develop KSA's that would enable them to face uncertainty in the future.

Vision Statements On a Desirable Future For Our Children (Appendix K)

Appendix K contains the eight vision statements on what a desirable future for our children would "look like." They were created at the second focus group session on March 2 for the purpose of providing a focus for subsequent cohort deliberations. The impetus to meet for this purpose was the result of two factors: 1) participants were curious to find out what the other cohorts had identified and concluded; and 2) participants felt that it was important to align their deliberations at this point in the Project in order to facilitate consensus-building later on.

The vision statements were intended to describe a future world that was not only desirable but also realistic, envisioning the world ten to fifteen years from the present. At the second focus group session, participants were divided into two sub-groups, each containing representatives from all four cohorts. Each representative shared his/her respective cohort's findings to date, after which each sub-group reached consensus on statements that would incorporate to the greatest extent possible all the ideas presented.

When the sub-groups came together, a consensus on the final statements was fairly easy to achieve with much of the time spent "wordsmithing" the final product.

The Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KSA's) of Success (Appendix L)

Some participants realized, after engaging in the process of identifying the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children need to acquire in order to be successful now and in the future, that the most important attributes were attitudes. Virtually no statements on knowledge outcomes were incorporated in the final document, primarily because participants felt that the information explosion that we were currently experiencing, and which likely will accelerate in the future, renders most knowledge outcomes redundant. Participants therefore focused on the skills and attitudes that our children would have to develop in order to access and use the information to their advantage.

Whereas the document does not reflect it, participants were unanimous in acknowledging that the development of the "attitudes for success" would begin with the rearing of children and should be a concerted effort on the part of all educational stakeholders. The primacy of attitudes is indicated by their detailed description in the final document. Participants acknowledged, however, that imparting desirable attitudes may be the most significant aspect of raising and educating children. Participant comments gleaned from their journals and their interview responses bear this out.

The next phase of the Project will be to identify the educational opportunities provided in the family, school and community that would engender and inculcate the attitudes listed. No one involved in the Project was naive enough to believe that such a "curriculum for success" would miraculously ensure success for all students; however, they felt that the statements would have an impact in their personal fulfillment of their respective roles--as parents, teachers, community members, and students and would at least promote a dialogue on what children should become. Once those opportunities are identified, the complementary and independent roles of each educational stakeholder to create them would be delineated.

What might be the implications of this "curriculum for success" for Community School? In terms of the school staff's role in creating the educational opportunities that serve to at least *reinforce* the desired attitudes, the reforms to school organization and programming will be the subject of discussion among members of the school staff. A cursory analysis of the traditional school experience that children encounter in relation to their impact on promoting the desirable attitudes will undoubtedly lead to some critical reflection on the *status quo* and suggests that some significant reforms are needed.

The following summary identifies the fifteen attitudes that the Project participants concluded were prerequisite in order for children to successfully meet the challenges they will face in their future. They are best considered with the following stem:

In order to achieve a desirable future and to be personally successful in meeting the challenges and fulfilling the roles that they will face as adults, children need to become ...

A. Flexible/Adaptable

B. Caring for/considerate of others

C. Ambitious, self-motivated, resourceful & industrious

D. Communicative

E. Responsible & Accountable

F. Perseverant/passionate (care deeply about something)

G. Resilient

H. Confident/Strong Self-Esteem

I. Democratic

J. Creative, curious, innovative, imaginative

K. Sensible economically

L. Reflective

M. Tolerant

N. Lifelong learners

O. Committed to personal health

It is clearly evident, unfortunately, that much of the way that schools and learning opportunities are traditionally structured *restricts* students' ability to develop some of these attitudes and may even undermine their own efforts. Consider two of the desirable

attitudes: *I. Democratic* and *J. Creative, curious, innovative, imaginative*. To what extent do we give students the opportunity to influence decision-making in our schools? To what extent do we give them significant choices? To what extent are students given the opportunity to be creative in the manner in which they demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes? How do educators foster "innovation and imagination" in their lesson planning? If a lifelong passion for learning is an important attitude for success, what are educators doing to promote it? It must be acknowledged, however, that educators are introducing programs and policies that reinforce some of the desirable attitudes. Increasingly, many schools are being very pro-active in promoting tolerance and responsibility through their discipline policies and character education initiatives.

Clearly, more could be done. Some Project participants promoted the introduction of critical reflection (through dialogue) into the school curriculum as a means of instilling responsibility, tolerance, adaptability and resilience in our students. As their personal perspectives expand, they may learn to be more considerate of others and accepting of circumstances over which they have little or no control.

Chapter VIII

Beyond The Research

In this chapter, I will propose that dialogue as a hermeneutic approach to research has potential benefits to all organizations in general and public education in particular. I acknowledge and describe the challenges for the researcher and/or dialogue facilitator and for participants and offer suggestions to overcome them. I propose areas for further research that has emanated from the Community School Dialogue Project and conclude with a brief analysis of the benefits that accrue to participants. I have entitled the sections *Dialogue and Organizational Effectiveness*, *The Potential of Dialogue For Public Education*, *The Challenges of the Dialogue Research Process*, *Personal Benefits of the Dialogue Experience*, and *Further Research*.

Dialogue And Organizational Effectiveness

The use of the dialogue process as a strategy to improve organizational effectiveness is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is gaining greater acceptance as a means to engender commitment and to foster collaborative relationships among those who work interdependently in any organization. It has gained prominence as a result of a recent shift in organizational cultures; namely, the replacement of a competitive spirit, individualism, and outcomes orientation with cooperation, collaboration, and a focus on relationships. According to Ellinor and Gerard (1998),

> what is 'lost and rotting' in organizations cannot be blamed on corrupt leaders or on those in power over us. Scapegoats will no longer serve as catharsis for the common problems and dilemmas of our times. It is to ourselves that we must look and to what resides in our shared mind-sets and what is found in our shared culture. The crisis of meaning we experience is rooted on our unconscious holding of outdated patterns of social behaviors. (p. 6)

Positive, fulfilling and values-oriented relationships among organizational members are now seen as essential to organizational success, beginning with the establishment of purpose and vision, an alignment of organizational and personal values, and organizational structures and procedures that foster a spirit of trust and interdependency. It potentially can imbue vitality and relevance into organizations and our work world. Shared meaning becomes the foundation for collective action as all members of the organization develop an awareness and appreciation of how the organization operates. Dialogue, under optimum circumstances, facilitates an open and frank exchange of ideas, uncovering issues that might otherwise remain unspoken yet are counterproductive and undermine positive relationships and effective organizational performance.

Dialogue reminds us of the importance of positive relationships in accomplishing common goals. It gives participants new perspectives on the organization--its purpose, mission, goals and the role each member holds in accomplishing them--and increases participant awareness of the effects of individual action on the work and lives of others,

and on the operation of the organizational effectiveness. Dialogue focuses on relationships that are in effect the "mortar" that joins the parts of an organization and are critical to the stability and integrity of it structure (a variation of systems thinking). It fosters commitment to the organization and its success by creating allegiance and positive relationships among its members who relate more authentically to each other rather than to the organization as an entity. This is manifested in "service beyond duty," initiative, and leadership. Dialogue democratizes the operation of the organization. Organizational leaders need to possess certain attitudes if the process is to have its desired effects; namely, a willingness to share power and decentralize decision-making, and to accommodate the needs and desires of employees (to the extent that they are aligned with the purpose and mission of the organization). Communication needs to be open, honest, and accessible to all (a far cry from the system of communication that is created in a competitive atmosphere); the operation of the organization must be "transparent." The respective roles and specialized skills of each person in the organization must be honored and acknowledged for its contribution to its effectiveness. Most importantly, all relationships must be based on *trust*--of each person's integrity, commitment to the organization, ability to fulfill his/her role, and commitment to growth. This cannot exist only in a person's work life--it has to be an integral part of each one's ethic. This transition in the way an organization functions will require that trust to be earned (rather than expected) over time--in the dialogue and in people's subsequent words and actions.

The "payoff" to the organization is the renewed commitment and dedicated effort of all members of the organization to contribute to the achievement of the organization's

purpose and mission. There emerges a closer alignment between the intentions of the organization (i.e., its purpose and mission), the performance of its members, and its outcomes.

The Potential of Dialogue For Public Education

To the extent that the public education system is an organization, one that operates primarily on an industrial model, the dialogue process can potentially be an effective means of improving its effectiveness. Sergiovanni (2000) defines school effectiveness as

> a school's ability to achieve higher levels of thoughtfulness among its students, to foster relationships characterized by caring and civility, and to record increases in the quality of student performance on both conventional and alternative assessments. (p. xiii)

Introducing the dialogue process in school educational programs could potentially develop the attitudes and skills in students that achieve Sergiovanni's vision of effective education. It could lead to the establishment of a new relationship among those involved in this endeavour--the students, their parents, the staff (in all categories), and the larger community--and to a collaborative process to identify the purpose, mission, and vision of education, particularly at the community level. Its greatest impact on the current model of delivery may be the introduction of a collaborative approach to teaching and learning.

It may lead to a rather radical change in the way stakeholders, particularly educators, envision and act in their relationships with the other stakeholders. It has the potential of changing how children are taught, including the respective roles of the teacher and the student in presenting and evaluating the lesson objectives. Education may again become a *community* responsibility, with opportunities extended to students beyond the school walls.

In public education, it has the potential of re-establishing a deeply-felt sense of purpose and mission among stakeholders--students, their parents, and educators--that engenders renewed commitment and hope, and fosters a more collaborative environment. It promotes a rather radical departure from the traditional approach to public education; an approach that fragments curriculum into distinct disciplines, that fosters competition among students and schools, that establishes exclusive roles for educational stakeholders, and that respects tradition and an industrial model.

It became evident to participants, in the early stages of the Project, that dialogue was quite different than conversation in the current vernacular. In their interviews, participants acknowledged that the process, in which they were now well immersed, had application to other contexts. Many participants expressed the desire to have the dialogical skills taught to others so that they might enjoy the benefits, and organizations might increase their effectiveness.

The benefits to society and the promotion of better human relations were cited.

It would serve well to circumvent misunderstandings between people and thus go a long way towards mutual understanding and tolerance ... It would indeed make for an interesting population of citizens if people would take more time to think, ask questions, and listen to the answers. ***C1***

I think it would be neat to teach everybody that process (of dialogue); whether they can always apply it or not, I don't know ... In general, I think that's an exercise we all should be able to go through ... and it could be applied to family as well a work ... It could involve children in decision-making in the family. ***C1***

It could be (used in) any kind of situation when you're having a difficulty that you have to look at from ... different perspectives. I think it's a really good way of the mediated situation like that. ***P1***

You've got to be able to see other people's points of view and talk about it so that you can understand where the other person is coming from. ***T1***

I was continually reminded of the fact that, if we want a society which functions with the best interests of the whole community at heart, we must be prepared, as individuals, to seek the balance whereby personal rights and freedoms may not always remain utmost in the face of societal harmony .... The key, I believe, is finding that balance which serves society and the individual's rights maximally.

This is never simple or easy and requires a lot of dialogue between all stakeholders on an ongoing basis. ***P1***

Some of the adult participants felt that the dialogue process could play a key role in the way teachers educate children.

I would hope that we can carry some of that to the teachers and to the classroom ... We are really teaching in a dogmatic way and not really furthering the ... students, stimulating their thought processes or critical thinking processes .... It would be very nice to ... put a little wedge into (the) ... curriculum to offer that to students, whether it's on a volunteer basis ... or introduce it in a more formal way .... Because I think there's a multiplying effect there because these people ... will be an example to others. ***C1***

It will be very difficult for future children to get out of that 'box' (i.e., a limited view of reality) unless we give them the mental skills to do so. ***C1***

I think it is beneficial and I wish other people would pick it up and sit down and discuss (their) ... problems and try and find a solution ... I really wish that (it) ... could be ... instilled in the children so that, when they reach the stage and need to solve problems, then they could maybe use that course of action .... I'm hoping, ... they will be able to take (it) into their personal lives and maybe expand it through the school. ***C3***

I have the sense that we've got a bunch of believers in this group now that are very keen on the dialogue process and are starting to really educate themselves about what it's like to dialogue over issues. I think we have to make the school population, as a whole, believers as well. ***P1***

I think a lot of the kids in this school (would) become great ... hockey players to scientists ... after this (i.e., learning how to dialogue). We'll have good jobs ... because what we're thinking about (is) ... what we need to do to ... get a good job ... and what challenges they will face so that we can prepare kids for that ... I think they should be teaching more like you've got to be planning ahead for what's going to be happening in the future. ***S3***

It should be part of every component to the educational system. ***P2***

(The) Alberta Home and School Councils Association ... (are) very interested in the whole process and how it's working ... ; they think it's wonderful, a great idea because you're involving all the stakeholders in meaningful input, not just a lip-service ... They like the in-depth, ... full discussion amongst all the partners. ***C2***

Since the focus of the Dialogue Project was the education of children, some participants cited newfound appreciation for the importance of this task for everyone in our society, including school staff and parents.

I learned that no matter how we want the future to be for our children, we still don't have that much say and control over what the future will really look like. All we can really contribute, as parents, is to equip our children as completely as possible, to the best of our abilities when raising them, and then allow them to make the choices that they need to as people in their own right. Hopefully, that will be enough to stand them in good stead so that they can make the best decisions for themselves, and place themselves where they want to be in the future. ***P1***

As the discussion progressed, I began to realize what a huge responsibility our society has, preparing our children for these future realities. ***P1***

Children must ... be prepared to take part lifelong in volunteer work for the service it provides to their community and the character that it builds in the individual .... Our challenge is to, I think, model this for them by example. ***P1***

It's a fantastic way ... of getting different educational stakeholders together and talking in a way that they haven't spoken before ... It's made me more aware of the need to have a school community and to be able to identify your stakeholders, and to realize that the stakeholders really have to be working together to accomplish an outcome; that no individual stakeholder can save or keep the educational system running properly. ***T2***

I was stimulated to the point that 'yes,' maybe the educating, encouraging, and preparation of children with input from all aspects of society can help to change the world for the better. ***C3***

The Challenges of the Dialogue Research Process

The personal benefits of participation in a dialogue research process are supported by the comments of participants in the Community School Dialogue Process. The promise that this process holds for organizational effectiveness in any context, and for education in particular has already been elaborated upon. The challenges that the researcher/facilitator faces have also been addressed. There are however some other challenges that any researcher considering the use of this type of hermeneutic approach to research should keep in mind and accommodate in planning the research.

1. In order for the dialogue experience to create the opportunity for participants to undergo a perspective shift or transformation, they must be willing to devote a tremendous amount of time to the endeavour. The sessions must be frequent enough, at least once every month, to maintain momentum and participant motivation. For the researcher as dialogue facilitator, this implies even more commitment of time and effort. All participants must be aware that the process will likely exceed most predictions in terms of the timeline. For reasons of practicality, a timeline (and deadline) for the sessions must be established. Participants should be prepared to make the commitment of time

and effort from the outset and pledge to maintain involvement unless there are unavoidable causes of termination.

2. The effectiveness of the dialogue sessions and the motivation of participants to actively and willing participate, given the attendant risks to participants (as detailed in Theme IV in Chapter V), depends heavily on the facilitator. S/He must remain committed, even enthusiastic, to the endeavour to point of "infectiousness" in order to help participants maintain their motivation. S/he must also be vigilant for signs of participant recalcitrance, withdrawal, or waning interest and take appropriate action to maintain the culture of the group. It is imperative that the dialogue group refocuses on its purposes for participation and on the "protocols" from time to time. The facilitator must ensure that the venue is comfortable and conducive to dialogue; i.e., free of distractions and interruptions. It is critical that s/he possess a high level of communication and analytical skills in order to play the role of "provocateur" and to maintain the flow of the dialogue when the group encounters a "block" or "dead-end" and looks to the facilitator to re-invigorate it.

3. The participant selection process is also critical to ensure that there are no tacit "personal agendas" or motives on the part of individuals that might undermine the culture and purpose of the dialogue experience. Prospective participants need to be clear on the nature of the experience they are about to undertake

and on the specific commitments they are expected to make. There will likely be a variety of personality types, with varying levels of confidence and communication skills, which will prove challenging if everyone is expected to participate freely and is given the opportunity to contribute. The "meta-dialogue" must therefore take place at the outset in order to alert participants to the inevitable impediments and to share the responsibility to adhere to the "protocols." There may come a time when an individual participant may have to be removed from the dialogue group, but this should be avoided through a thorough participant selection process and vigilance on the part of all participants (including self-monitoring) to protect the culture of the dialogue group.

4. The researcher must decide at the outset on the degree of latitude that the dialogue will have. There must be a balance between "free-association" and pre-determined outcomes. A dialogue that is too far ranging in terms of the topics or "objects" under study risks losing participant interest and inconclusive outcomes. Too much specificity on the purposes and outcomes of the dialogue may result in a less effective transformational experience for participants. In reality, participants in dialogue are drawn together initially for a common purpose which in the case of hermeneutic research is determined by the researcher. The key is to make the focus or purpose as "open-ended" as possible to give as much free rein to the deliberations as possible. The use of the *Inspiration©* software to record and track the

dialogue serves a valuable purpose in maintaining structure and direction to the endeavour. Perhaps the dialogue participants should be given the opportunity to provide input into the questions that will drive the dialogue.

Personal Benefits of the Dialogue Experience

The benefits of the dialogue experience, regardless of its context, that accrue to participants' personal lives are equally important. It offers the opportunity to relate to the world (the environment and each other) in more conscious, meaningful, and fulfilling ways. It has the potential of providing the participant with a better sense of his/her "place in the world" and a grounding that makes one's existence in an increasingly complex, dynamic, and challenging world more hopeful and relevant. It is particularly effective in allaying the concerns of those who feel a lack of control or predictability in their world through the discovery that we are not alone in this malaise and that we can best "survive and thrive" through collective, collaborative effort. It is a counter-balance to the increasing fragmentation that pervades our society and its institutions, fostered by the competitive, self-sufficient values that are inherent in the free enterprise mindset.

As the expectations of others of us become increasingly more complex and threaten our very identity, the dialogue process presents the opportunity to "simplify" life-- to re-establish a self-concept that is based on confidence, hope, and values--and to regain a sense of control over some aspects of our lives while accommodating those aspects we simply cannot control or predict. It is therefore "life-affirming." Dialogue

reconciles us to each other, seeing others not as competitors for scarce resources and opportunities but as allies whose support is essential to a fulfilling life and self-sustaining future. Underlying its purpose are such values as trust, honesty, respect, and humility. Most critical, however, is a sincere respect for and honoring of all humankind and a genuine caring for the welfare of others. It is founded on a certainty that individual well-being is inextricably linked to the well-being of all and that the results of collaborative effort exceed the results that emanate from individual effort. If the way we communicate with each other is a reflection of our values and attitudes, these must be exposed if we expect to improve our means to convey our thoughts.

The dialogue process can be described as one in which participants "stop, think, and wonder" about things and to ask questions that would not have otherwise arisen. It challenges the "natural order of things" or how we perceive the world (and the belief that everyone else more or less sees it the same way). Dialogue allows participants to re-construct their world and to re-establish a more meaningful relationship with it. It results in a transformation of consciousness.

Further Research

> *At the end of the day, we've got a living document--that there's community consensus ... surrounding it--a more real vision of education that people will support; ... We have (to have) the courage to try maybe one or two different things*

each year to move us in the direction of the challenges our children are going to be faced with in the future--the real stuff. ***P2***

In the spirit of action research, the next phase of the Project will continue over the 2002-03 school year as the Community School Council assumes responsibility. The "product" created by the Project participants will be distributed throughout the community and feedback on it solicited. Key questions #7 and #8, on the complementary and independent roles of educational stakeholders in creating the educational opportunities for children to develop the desired KSA's, will need to be addressed, likely through the creation of another dialogue group (although the Council may choose to make the group heterogeneous in terms of representation from all stakeholder groups). The Project participants would be invited to take an active role in the second phase of the Project, although they would certainly not be obliged.

Chapter IX

Research Implications: The Promise of Dialogue

The purposes of this research were to create the opportunity for a transformational learning experience for participants, and to consider the potential of dialogue to initiate significant educational reform in a school community, in this context, through the creation of a list of the desirable knowledge, skills, and attitudes which children should acquire in order to be successful in their lives.

In Chapter VI, I used personal testimonials, taken from participants' journals and from their interview transcripts, to imply that they experienced transformational learning as I have defined the term. The data were organized into six themes: 1) an expanded perspective, 2) an awareness of the potential of an expanded perspective and its impact on lifestyle and behavior, 3) enhanced meta-cognition (i.e., self-awareness of one's thought processes and how one interprets reality), 4) affirmation of self, 5) reinforcement of existing values and positions, and 6) enhanced introspection and empathetic skills. These are not intended to be "definitive" conclusions, however; they represent my own interpretation and analysis of participants' testimonials and my own experience as a co-participant in the dialogue. The data imply that participants were impacted by their experience in the Project and that critical reflection through dialogue has potential in effecting transformational learning in participants.

Would participants in other research initiatives that use similar methodologies experience the "transformation?" There are certainly no "guarantees" that these themes would be replicated in another study since there are so many factors (particularly the personalities, intentions, and commitment of participants) that impact the process of dialogue. Qualitative research points to "possibilities," not final conclusions. Participants may express different feelings and conclusions in different ways, or the researcher may interpret their testimonials differently than I in future studies. The data do, however, provide intriguing possibilities that relate to the "promise of dialogue" in expanding participants' perspectives and honing their analytical skills through critical reflection.

Only further research would determine whether this transformational learning would have any impact on participants' individual perspectives and behaviors *beyond* the Project's term. Without a sustained dialogue, however, it is likely that participants will revert to their "habits of mind," although a rather permanent change in some attitudes, e.g., more tolerance for other viewpoints, might have been effected. I can speak, however, with conviction and authority on the effect of the dialogue experience on my own life.

In my professional role, I believe that the dialogue experience has had an effect on the way I communicate. I believe that I have become more analytical and empathetic in my communication with students, parents and colleagues. I have learned to discipline myself in striving to "understand first, then to be understood." I listen for the tacit

messages that the person with whom I am engaged in conversation is conveying, through his/her words, inflection, and body language. I have concluded that often the concerns that elicit emotional responses from another are usually not the "real" issues and therefore strive to assist the person to uncover and articulate the underlying issues and assumptions that have been manifested by the emotion. I find myself being more patient in allowing the other person to state his/her views, without interruption, and more consciously avoid judging before I have ascertained all the "facts." I avoid making statements in my response that are judgmental, wherein I assume to know or understand the other person's motives or intentions. I assume that the other has noble intentions and is honest and trustworthy. On matters that are of interest or importance to me, I seek the counsel and perspective of as many others as I can, even those whom I would not previously have considered worthy of my time and attention.

My experience as researcher/facilitator has honed my skills in the practice of dialogue and in moderating dialogue sessions. I have used these skills at Faculty Council and Staff Meetings to engage others in reflection on the authenticity (defined as an alignment of intentions or principles with actions) of our individual and collective practices. Unfortunately, such reflection takes time and effort; I have expedited it at Community School by using the little time we do have to collaborate to discuss fundamental issues, avoiding the trivial topics that used to take up so much of our staff meeting times (I use e-mail to communicate information and to initiate feedback on day-to-day decisions.) I have empowered others on staff to take leadership roles by teaching them dialogue skills and the process of starting with the "big picture" in mind.

I believe that the experience has "humbled" me in the sense that I feel less certain about what I purport to "know." I am less likely to pre-judge people or situations and more likely to give others the "benefit of the doubt." I find myself more willing to consult with others in my decision-making and am more conscious of the principles that inform my practice, e.g., that the welfare of children is the most important consideration. I have learned to trust people more and seek ways to allow others to take leadership roles. I have consciously reduced the school community's dependency on my leadership by empowering the school council, the staff, and even students (at least to a greater extent than before) to take responsibility for the culture and successes of our school community. I hope to facilitate this through the further evolution of the Community School Dialogue Project, leading to a school community mission and vision statement that articulates the principles on which our future actions and programs will be based.

I believe that the children's educational experience can be more effective and lead to future success for more students with a closer alignment of educational stakeholders' values and principles. The efforts of parents and educators in inculcating the desired attitudes and skills in children can be better coordinated and lead to the identification of effective learning opportunities. Most importantly, however, I have developed more respect for and higher expectations of students in taking greater responsibility for their progress. I have attempted to foster leadership skills in students by forming a Student Leadership Council at Community School, open to students in Grades 6 to 9. The Council identifies projects in the school and the community that will enhance the welfare of others. I have assisted students in considering the "end" (i.e., desired outcomes) before

identifying the strategies, and in assessing the effectiveness of their initiatives in achieving the pre-determined purposes and goals. I have used the Council to elicit student opinions/perspective on school issues such as playground rules and student dances. At times, I have mediated the students' perspective with that of the staff in creating policy and procedures.

In the fall of 2002, I introduced the Professional Learning Community Initiative at Community School that seeks to engage educational stakeholders in a dialogue on the principles and values that will inform our policies, programs, and decisions and which will be the basis of a new school mission and vision statement. The Initiative will use the mission and vision statements to evaluate the staff's professional practices to engender greater authenticity. Based on the work of Richard Dufour from Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois, the Professional Learning Community focuses on three fundamental questions: 1) What do we want our children to learn? 2) How will we know that they have learned it? and 3) What will we do for those who don't succeed? The Initiative has the potential to significantly alter the ways teachers collaborate on planning their lessons and, most importantly, evaluating their students. Ideally, teachers will take *collective* responsibility for the success of students and share their expertise and strategies to ensure success for all. Teachers will form teams, of their own choosing, to identify key curriculum outcomes, the means to evaluate their mastery, and the means of assisting students who need remediation to ensure success for all.

I believe that I would not have considered this reform had I not experienced the perspective shift that emanated from my experience with the Community School Dialogue Project.

I have concluded that dialogue does hold significant promise to initiate educational reform, if it is structured in accordance with the "protocols" that were practiced in the Project and if the opportunity to engage in it is provided to educational stakeholders. I believe that it can be undertaken in a meaningful, yet feasible way through small-group sessions such as the Professional Learning Community teams described above. I hope to teach the dialogue process to students through the creation of a junior high elective course in 2003-04. I will incorporate Steven Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People as a means of engendering reflection in student's school lives with the goal of empowering them to assume more control and responsibility for their success.

The Community School Council has disseminated the Project's final document in the school community but has yet to engage in any further research. I intend to assist the Council executive in seeking stakeholder feedback on the two remaining key questions #7 and #8 relating to the complementary and independent roles of educational stakeholders in creating the opportunities for children to learn the desired KSA's. I cannot predict what those opportunities might 'look like' but I am confident that there will be enough interest to initiate the process. I hope that at least some of my fellow

participants in the Community School Dialogue Project will come forward when the opportunity arises to carry on the dialogue.

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Appendix A

The School Newsletter Invitation To Participate

Community School Undertakes An Ambitious Project!

The Community School Council, representing our students, parents, and staff, is undertaking a unique and exciting project that is intended to

- redefine effective education at our school, and
- to devise the programs and strategies that will achieve it,

for our students in the years in which they are enrolled here.

The goals of public education in Alberta include the following statements:

1. All Alberta students have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to be self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing members of society.

2. Students will understand personal and community values and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

3. Students will…be prepared for entry into the workplace or post-secondary studies.

4. Alberta's educational system must focus on what all students need to learn in order to participate successfully in an economy and society undergoing fundamental changes.

Our school enjoys a wonderful reputation for academic excellence, supported by our students' results on the annual Provincial Achievement Tests, administered at the end of the 3rd, 6th, and 9th grades, and our graduates' academic achievement in high school and beyond. We enjoy strong, active involvement in and dedication to the education of students from all of our educational partners.

We are now seeking to re-define and perhaps expand the programming for our students, primarily focusing on the non-academic knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are mandated by the provincial government which are prerequisite to a prosperous and harmonious society. To that end, we are seeking 4 representatives from each of the educational partner groups at Community School. They would meet on a semi-monthly basis (from February to June, 2001) to negotiate a common vision of what an effective education at Community School 'looks like,' by integrating the needs, desires, and values of all members of our school community. From that vision, our intention is to identify the desirable outcomes, strategies, and measures that will achieve it for our students as

well as the respective roles and responsibilities of each educational partner. It is expected that the vision and the plan to achieve it would then be re-evaluated on an annual basis.

The Community School Council is sponsoring this dialogue, under the leadership of the school Principal. A committee of the Community School Council has identified some prerequisites for the representatives chosen. They include:

- People who represent a cross-section of the group
- People who are open-minded and willing to consider others' perspectives without judgment
- People who are good communicators
- People who have contacts among those they represent (or are willing to seek them out)
- People who do not hold strong positions on any aspect of public education

Staff, student and parent representatives will not likely be difficult to identify. We are, however, earnestly seeking 4 residents of the community, who do not presently have children in any school, to represent the non-parent segment of the community. We want adult community members, who are involved in a variety of employment situations - e.g., large corporation, small business, self-employment, and government agencies - or who are retired, to bring their perspective to the dialogue. Nominations and volunteers should be directed to Bob Garneau, Principal.

The 'products' of Alberta's public school system – our students - are the future employees, entrepreneurs, taxpayers, citizens, and leaders of our society - and your neighbours! In the belief that it truly 'takes a community to raise a child,' our intention is to create an educational program at Community School that provides our students with the learning opportunities that will engender the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable them to successfully meet the future challenges of employment in a global economy, citizenship in a society undergoing significant demographic changes, and family-life in a world full of distractions.

Stay tuned for further developments in the new year!

R. Garneau, Principal

Appendix B

Newspaper Article of January 12/19, 2001

School Needs Volunteers To Define Success

The Community School Council, representing our students, parents, and staff, is undertaking a unique and exciting project under the leadership of the school's principal, Bob Garneau.

The purpose of the project is to define effective education at Community School, and to devise the programs and strategies that will achieve its outcomes for students in the years in which they are enrolled. The council is inviting representatives of each of the stakeholder groups--parents, students, teachers, and the 'non-parent' segment of our community--to take an active and equal role in this important endeavour.

The goals of public education in Alberta include the following:

1. All Alberta students have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to be self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing members of society.

2. Students will understand personal and community values and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

3. Students will…be prepared for entry into the workplace or post-secondary studies.

4. Alberta's educational system must focus on what all students need to learn in order to participate successfully in an economy and society undergoing fundamental changes.

"Community School students regularly achieve superb results on the annual Provincial Achievement Tests, administered at the end of the 3rd, 6th, and 9th grades, and our graduates do very well in high school and beyond. The school has a dedicated and expert staff who receive strong, active support for their efforts from the parent community. However, students and those taxpayers in the community, who do not have children in school, rarely are given meaningful input into educational decisions," Garneau said.

"This project aims to change that."

The school council is now seeking the input of all stakeholders to expand the programming for students, primarily focusing on the non-academic knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are prerequisite for their success in high school and beyond. To that

end, they are seeking 4 representatives from each of the educational partner groups at Community School. The representatives will meet regularly from February to June, 2001 to negotiate a common vision of what an effective education at Community School "looks like," by integrating the needs, desires, and values of all members of our school community. From that vision, the intention is to identify the desirable and necessary outcomes, strategies, and measures that will achieve it for Community School students.

It will likely lead to the establishment of new roles and responsibilities for each of the educational stakeholders in achieving the vision. It is expected that the vision and the plan to achieve it would then be re-evaluated and revised on an annual basis through the school's Education Plan.

"The 'products' of Alberta's public school system – our students - are the future employees, entrepreneurs, taxpayers, citizens, and leaders of our society - and your neighbours," said Garneau. In the belief that it truly "takes a community to raise a child," the intention is to create an educational program at Community School that provides students with the learning opportunities that will engender the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable them to successfully meet the future challenges of high school and, perhaps more importantly, employment in a global economy, citizenship in a society undergoing significant demographic changes, and family-life in a world full of distractions.

Student, teacher, and parent representatives will be selected by the school council over the next few weeks. The council is actively seeking four residents of the community, who do not presently have children in any school, to represent the non-parent segment of the community. They are looking for adult community members, who are involved in a variety of employment situations--large corporations, small business, self-employment, and government agencies--or who are retired, and who have an abiding interest in public education, to bring their perspective to this dialogue.

Members of the community who are interested in being part of this project, are asked to contact Bob Garneau at Community School, XXX-XXXX. Deadline for application is Jan. 26.

Appendix C

Prospective Participant Interview Survey

The following questions will be posed to a short-list of prospective participants in the research project and are intended to solicit responses that will give the interviewer evidence of the respondent's qualifications for participation.

1. What is your understanding of the purpose and format of the project?
2. Why are you interested in participating in the project?
3. To what degree are you satisfied with the current state of education in Alberta?
4. Some people believe that more funding for education would resolve many of the current crises schools are facing and lead to much improvement. What is your response to that proposal?
5. Please outline your educational history (i.e., grades completed, schools attended, post-secondary education [where applicable]).
6. How are you currently involved in education—as a student, volunteer in the school, parent of a student, etc.?
7. How long have you lived in the area?
8. Have you had or do you currently have any involvement in the community (e.g., service clubs, programs, activities, boards)?
9. What do you know about Community School?
10. Are you satisfied with the quality of education provided to students at Community School?

11. Do you have any specific suggestions regarding changes you would make to how students at Community School are be educated? If so, briefly outline them.
12. If you were a stakeholder representative in the project, how would you go about soliciting input from your fellow stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, staff, or non-parent members of the community)?
13. Are there any restrictions on your availability or do you have strong preferences on the dates/times for project meetings from February to June, 2001? If so, please outline them.

Appendix D

Interview Consent Form - Prospective Participants

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in what should be an exciting experience, entitled the Community School Dialogue Project. It is intended to create a consensus among the educational partners at Community School – students, teachers, parents and residents of the surrounding community (who do not currently have children enrolled in any school) – regarding a 'vision' of what effective education at the school should 'look like' and the ways we can provide it for all students. The Project will also be the subject of doctoral research undertaken by the Project researcher/facilitator, Mr. Bob Garneau (Principal at Community School), under the auspices of the Department of Secondary Education, The University of Alberta. The research project will examine the process of dialogue used in the Project as a means of fostering creativity, positively affecting participants' thinking skills, and helping participants make a connection between what they value and believe with what they do.

There will be four representatives (and two alternates) of each of the school's four educational partners chosen to participate in the Project. Eight to ten applicants from each of the stakeholder groups will be selected to take part in an interview, about 15 to 20 minutes in duration, with Mr. Garneau at a mutually convenient time. Their responses to the interview questions will be summarized in writing and recorded on audiotape by him. The notes he takes during the interview and the interview audiotape will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees. Only Mr. Garneau and the

participant him/herself will know the pseudonym assigned. Upon request to him, a participant may review the transcript of his/her interview and ask that any portion of the transcript be removed if it is objectionable. There will be no deception used: the entire research process will be 'transparent' to participants. Once the participants and alternates for the Project have been selected, the interview forms and audiotapes that contain the responses of interviewees not invited to participate in the Project will be destroyed/erased. If you are invited to be a participant or alternate, and accept the invitation, your interview responses and the researcher/facilitator notes will be kept secure by Mr. Garneau and will be used in his research project. Only he and his research advisors -- Dr. David Smith (who may be contacted at davidg.smith@ualberta.ca or 492-0499) and Dr. Sue Scott (who may be contacted at sue.scott@ualberta.ca or 492-0551) and colleagues at the University of Alberta will have access to them. All documentation relating to the research will be secured by him so that no one else will ever has access to it without the express permission of the participants.

Should you be invited to participate in the Project, or to be an alternate, you will be asked to sign a separate Consent Form.

You are welcome to ask Mr. Garneau any questions of clarification regarding the interview process and the research project prior to the selection of applicants for interviews. You may contact him at bgarneau@xxxxxx.ca or XXX-XXXX. Interviewees may choose to terminate the interview at any time. They are asked not to divulge or discuss the nature of the interview process or the questions posed with anyone

except the Project researcher/facilitator, Mr. Garneau, until after the final selection of the participants and alternates has been completed.

Please complete the attached consent and return it to the researcher/facilitator if you wish to be considered for an interview.

Bob Garneau, Principal January, 2001

COMMUNITY SCHOOL DIALOGUE PROJECT

Prospective Participant Interview Consent Form

I, _____, hereby consent to participate in an
Please Print Your Name
interview if I am selected from among the applicants, with Mr. Bob Garneau, researcher/facilitator of the Community School Dialogue Project, in accordance with the conditions outlined in the letter I received. I understand the purpose of the interview, how it will be conducted, how my comments may be used, of my right to review the transcript of my interview (and to remove any objectionable portions), and where the transcript and audio tape of the interview will end up. If I am invited to be a participant or alternate in the Project, I will be representing the following educational partner group (circle one):

STUDENT PARENT TEACHER Community RESIDENT

Signed _____ Date _____

(For Students Only)

Please have a parent read and explain the information in the accompanying letter and counter-sign this Consent Form below. Parental permission must be received before a student can be considered for participation in an interview.

I, _____, the parent/guardian of this child, do hereby give

Please Print Your Name

my child permission to have him/her participate in an interview with Mr. Garneau, should s/he be selected from among the applicants, in accordance with the information contained in the letter I received. I acknowledge that Mr. Garneau, the project researcher/facilitator and interviewer, and I have explained the nature of this consent form to my child and that my child's signature above acknowledges his/her understanding and agreement with the conditions of the interview.

Signed _____ Date _____

Parents are encouraged to contact Mr. Garneau (at bgarneau@xxxxx.ca or XXX-XXXX) with questions!

Appendix E

Participant Consent Form

Thank you for volunteering to participate in a unique project in our school community, sponsored by the Community School Council. The project, entitled the Community School Dialogue Project, is intended to create a consensus among the educational partners at Community School – students, teachers, parents and residents of the surrounding community (who do not currently have children enrolled in any school) – regarding a 'vision' of what effective education at the school should 'look like' and the ways we can provide it for all students. The Project will also be the subject of doctoral research undertaken by the Project researcher/facilitator, Mr. Bob Garneau (Principal at Community School), under the auspices of the Department of Secondary Education, The University of Alberta. The research project advisors are Dr. David Smith (who may be contacted at davidg.smith@ualberta.ca or 492-0499) and Dr. Sue Scott (who may be contacted at sue.scott@ualberta.ca or 492-0551). The research project will examine the process of dialogue being used as a means of fostering creativity, positively affecting participants' thinking skills, and helping participants make a connection between what they value and believe with what they do. There will be no deception used: the entire research process will be 'transparent' to participants.

There will be four representatives (and two alternates) of each of the school's educational partners chosen to participate in the Project. As a participant in this Project, you are asked to carefully consider the following conditions of and your involvement and the inherent responsibilities:

1. You should plan to attend every meeting of your cohort and those of the focus group. Although the final schedule of meetings will be determined at the first focus group session, it is anticipated that each cohort meeting will be 2 hours in length, take place on a weeknight (or, for students, during the school day), and occur bi-weekly in March (and, as the need arises, until the end of May); it is anticipated that focus group meetings will take place bi-weekly on Saturdays from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm from March to May (inclusive). Snacks and lunch will be provided to all participants free of charge. If you need to be absent from a meeting, you are asked to contact the Project researcher/facilitator, Bob Garneau, at Community School bgarneau@xxxxxx.ca or XXX-XXXX) or at home (XXX-XXXX), preferably with as much notice as possible. The Project researcher/facilitator will attend every cohort and focus group meeting. All meetings will take place at Community School.

2. You are invited to participate freely in the meeting discussions. You will not be compelled to make comments unless you want to; however, you will be asked to adhere to the 'protocols' that will be in effect during the meetings (a list of these will be provided to and discussed with you at the first focus groupmeeting). You are asked to respect the confidentiality of other participants by not divulging specific details about comments made or attributing them to individuals, in your conversations with non-participants. You are encouraged, however, to discuss the topics of discussion with anyone as a means of garnering their opinions and suggestions. You will be asked to share responsibilities with other group members for completing various tasks associated with the Project.

3. You will be invited to participate in a personal interview with the researcher/ facilitator, Bob Garneau, at the beginning, at the mid-point, and at the end of the Project period.

4. You will be asked to complete entries in a personal journal (provided) at the mid-point and at the end of the focus group meetings (only). The journals will be collected at the conclusion of each focus group meeting by the Project researcher/facilitator. He alone will have access to the journal, which he will read. Questions that may arise from the reading may be raised at times during the cohort or focus group meetings. Further details regarding the purpose and nature of journal entries will be presented at the first focus group meeting.

5. All focus group meetings and participant interviews will be audio-taped in their entirety. The audiotapes will be secured by the Project researcher/facilitator; only he will have access to the audiotapes which will be used in his research. A participant may review, upon request, any transcripts of his/her interviews and have objectionable portions removed.

6. You are responsible for your own transportation to and from the meetings.

7. You are free to terminate your participation in this Project at anytime for whatever reason. Depending on the point of departure in the Project process, departing participants may be replaced by an alternate for the balance of the Project timeline.

8. Throughout the Project, you are asked to be cooperative, respectful, and accepting of other participants. All participants are to be treated as equals in the deliberations, with others respecting their views and their right to speak or to be silent. The Project researcher/facilitator reserves the right to remove any participant from a meeting and/or to terminate the participation of anyone who does not act in a reasonable manner.

9. You are invited to meet with the Project researcher/facilitator at anytime during the Project timeline and to ask questions and raise concerns.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL DIALOGUE PROJECT

Participant Consent Form

I, _____, hereby consent to participate in the Community

Please Print Your Name

School Dialogue Project, in accordance with the conditions outlined in the letter I received. I understand the purposes of the Project, how it will be conducted, how my comments may be used, that I may review any transcripts of my interviews (and choose to have any objectionable portion removed), and where the transcripts and audiotapes of my interviews will end up. I am aware that I may terminate my involvement in the Project at any time, for any reason. I understand that my recorded and written comments will not be shared by the researcher with anyone else without my explicit permission. I also understand and pledge to adhere to the Protocols and to the Spirit of Dialogue, as they have been described to me.

Signed _____ Date _____

For Students (Only)

I, _____, the parent/guardian of this child, do hereby give my child

Please Print Your Name

permission to have him/her participate in The Community School Dialogue Project in accordance with the information contained in the letter I received. I acknowledge that Mr. Garneau, the Project researcher/facilitator and interviewer, has explained the nature of this consent form to my child and that my child's signature above acknowledges his/her understanding and agreement with the conditions of participation.

Signed _____ Date _____

I, Bob Garneau, the researcher/facilitator of the Community School Dialogue Project do hereby accept the participation of this person, who will act as a representative of one of the stakeholder groups at Community School.

Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix F

Participant Interview Questions

COMMUNITY SCHOOL DIALOGUE PROJECT

Phase I Interview Questions

As you know, the Project has two purposes:

1. to create a 'vision of education' for the community that will include recommendations for the outcomes or objectives of a student's school experience, the means to achieve them, and the roles of parents, teachers, students and the larger community in fulfilling the vision.

2. to provide participants in the Project with the opportunity to experience a sustained dialogue with other community members and to evaluate that experience for its benefits and challenges.

The following questions will be asked of all Dialogue participants and will be used as data in my doctoral research on their 'dialogue experience.' The term 'dialogue experience' refers to the discussions that participants have had in the cohort groups and on those occasions when all cohort members met. If you aren't sure about the meaning of the question, feel free to ask for clarification. The interview will be audio-taped to allow me to better document the comments each participant makes. Your identity will remain strictly anonymous.

1. Why did you join the Project in the first place?

2. How would you compare your experience in the Project to date, with your *initial* expectations (i.e., what you thought it would be like before the Project started) of what it would be like?

3. What would you say are the 'challenges,' (perhaps any difficult or unpleasant aspects of participation) that the 'dialogue experience' presents to those who take part?

4. What would you say are the 'benefits' (perhaps any pleasant or good aspects of participation) that the 'dialogue experience' presents to those who take part?

5. Typically, what are your thoughts *before* a cohort meeting and your thoughts/feelings *afterwards*?

6. How would you describe the experience of having to write in your journal after each

cohort meeting?

7. Did you see any benefits for *you* in writing your journal after each cohort meeting?

8. Have you discussed your dialogue experience with people outside the Project? If so, what aspects have you shared and what has been their reaction?

9. Given the fact that each participant can choose to leave the Project at any time, how would you explain the fact that no one has chosen to do so despite the fact that the Project is taking much more time to complete than anyone anticipated?

10. Do you see any advantages to using 'dialogue' to resolve problems or to get people to agree on a course of action?

11. Do you feel that the 'dialogue experience' is different than a 'conversation' among people? If so, how is it different?

12. What do you expect will happen as a result of the Dialogue Project; i.e., what purpose will it fulfill or what 'good' will it do?

13. Has your experience so far with the Dialogue Project changed any of your ideas or positions on issues? If so, which ones and describe the changes.

14. Has the 'dialogue experience' affected your communication skills?

15. Has the 'dialogue experience' affected your views on public education or schooling?

16. Were there any 'surprises' --- did anything happen in the Project that you were not expecting?

17. Any comments on the focus group session of March 2, when the adult and student participants met to negotiate a common vision?

18. What advice would you give to anyone considering participation in a dialogue project or group?

19. What did you think of the use of the *Inspiration*© software to record and display each idea/thought for all to view and reflect upon? Do you think that this had any benefit to the dialogue experience? What effect, if any, did the display of a person's idea on the 'screen,' for all to see, have on him or her?

20. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the 'dialogue experience' to date?

Appendix G

The Protocols of Dialogue

This process of dialogue in this context is unlikely to be one that participants will have experienced. It is critical, therefore, that the "protocols" be outlined and agreed upon at the outset. The following will be introduced to and adapted by the focus group: There should not be "non-negotiable" or "taboo" topics that participants do not want to consider.

- Participants may choose to remain silent if they are unwilling or not ready to speak.
- Whereas participants may pledge at the outset to be open-minded, they must not view the inevitable reluctance or refusal to address certain issues and to reveal some tacit assumptions as *wrong* or a violation of the 'rules;' but be willing to consider the reasons for this internal reaction as it arises.
- Participants are free to ask questions of clarification to speakers, (including the identification of the assumptions that underlie the speakers' views) and are asked to 'suspend' judgments (or right or wrong or appropriateness) about statements heard (i.e., use brainstorming techniques) no matter how 'revolutionary' they may sound.
- Participants should be prepared to explain their statements and avoid feeling defensive, assured that the questions are for clarification rather than judgment.
- Participants are asked to listen carefully to each speaker, to the extent that s/he could accurately paraphrase what has just been said and be aware of any tendency

to formulate a response or judgment while 'listening.'

- Participants are encouraged to keep notes throughout the dialogue, for further reflection.
- Participants are asked to be conscious of any changes in their personal perspectives that they may experience as a result of the dialogue, and to consider the reasons for them.
- Participants are asked to consider the foundations for their opinions, values, and beliefs; i.e., the assumptions made about the 'reality of the situation' under review, as a result of experiences; how they gather information on which to base their views.
- Every participant shares equal responsibility to ensure, through *collective negotiation*, that each cohort's views (i.e., hopes, desires, expectations) are given full consideration and accommodated (to the greatest extent possible) in any consensus position.
- Each participant shares equal responsibility to ensure that the rules of engagement are adhered to throughout the dialogue and to politely point out perceived transgressions.
- Participants will be asked to show respect for each other, assuring that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to be heard and being sensitive to the dynamics of power and authority (particularly in the relationship among the student, adult and teacher participants).

Appendix H

Participant Journals - Suggested Entry Points

After each Cohort and Focus Group meeting, you are asked to reflect on your meeting experience. You can write about any aspect of the meeting's deliberations or on whatever comes to mind. As a means of stimulating reflection, please consider (but don't feel obliged to) using the following stems to begin your writing:

A. On *what* was discussed:

One thing I heard which stuck in my mind was ...

I learned that ...

I was fascinated/intrigued by ...

I changed my mind about ...

B. On the *process* of dialogue:

I discovered that I ...

In terms of the <u>way</u> I think and form my opinions, I learned that ...

I should have ...

I wish I had ...

I regret that I ...

I was frustrated by ...

Sharing ideas with others helped me to ...

I learned that, to be a good listener, I ...

Appendix I

Key Questions To Guide The Cohort Dialogue

1. What would a desirable future society, for our children, 'look like?'
2. What are the challenges that our children will face in their adult years?
3. What are the roles that our children will have to fulfill as functioning adults in our society?
4. What are the challenges that our children face *today*?
5. What do our children need to be able to do in order to fulfill their future roles *and* to be successful in meeting their current challenges?
6. What skills, knowledge, and attitudes do children need to acquire in order to develop these attributes?
7. What role can the 'partners'--parents, school staff, the larger community, and the child him/herself--play in developing the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes (i.e., in educating our children)?
8. Which of these roles are *complementary* (shared) and which are *independent* (the primary responsibility of one partner)

Appendix J

Challenges and Roles That Children Will Face As Adults

(**Note**: the italicized, bold letters before each statement denotes the cohorts from whose dialogue the statement emanated; i.e., ***c*** = community cohort; ***p*** = parent cohort; ***s*** = student cohort; ***t*** = teacher cohort)

1. What would a desirable future for our children look like?

Security of Person

scPeaceful world:
- ***cs***No wars/No fighting
- ***c***Social stability
- ***c***Security of person and property:
  - ***c***Safe to walk anywhere, to leave your door unlocked
  - ***c***No break-ins, thefts, vandalism
- ***c***Trust and be able to count on your neighbour
- ***c***Well-being for all
- ***s***No terrorism
- ***s***People get along
- ***s***People talk instead of fighting to resolve differences
- ***s***Punish offenders and 'put away' those who are criminal

pA Sense of Safety
pProtection from physical, emotional, mental harm
pFair justice system:
- ***p***Publicly-funded system of quality legal representation
- ***p***Protection of charter rights/Presumption of innocence
- ***p***Community-based restitution (for minor crimes) + Universally-applied consequences (for serious crime)

Relationships

cTolerance and Compassion
tcRespect - for self/others
cAccept other viewpoints:
- ***c***Compromise of one's own views
- ***c***Accommodate other views

cUnderstanding:
- ***c***Discussion rather than arguing
- ***c***Genuine listening, rather than preparing a rebuttal
- ***c***Questioning, communicating back and forth to see it from another's view

cOpportunities for social interaction - see how other live and think, other lifestyles/cultures

*p*Tolerant people
*p*No tolerance for offensive situations
*p*Positive, flexible attitude - 'live and let live'
*p*Charity/Empathy
*p*People look out for each other
*p*Moral people:
*p*Fulfill expectations
*p*Have good intentions
*p*Be considerate of others (individuals and community):
*p*Respect for others' property
*p*Don't interrupt/interfere with others' enjoyment of their rights
*p*Accept others as they are:
*p*No prejudging
*p*Open, friendly, welcome as automatic response
*p*Respectful people:
*p*Honorable
*p*Willingness to understand others
*p*Good listening skills
*p*Sense of conscious (right/wrong) + ability to consider the consequences of actions
*p*Positive role models/friends
*p*Accessible (in one's life) positive influences
s Good community:
*s*People spend time getting to know each other
*s*No one does drugs/smokes
*s*Safe streets
*s*People think about the consequences of their actions before doing things
*s*Safe from harm everywhere in the world
*t*People are respectful to each other
*t*Understanding/accepting/awareness of each other's differences, similarities:
*t*Displays of respect in interactions:
*t*People wouldn't make fun of each other, make prejudicial statements to each other
*t*People listen attentively--wait for someone to finish speaking and not prejudging them; not formulating an opinion until then
*t*People don't abuse (physically, emotionally, mentally) each other
*t*Laws will reflect and guide people's respectful dealings with each other
*t*People are free from fear of harm because of their beliefs (if they are not infringing on the rights of others in living those beliefs)

Family

*c*Stable family units:
*c*Supportive parenting
*c*Guidance and examples from parents to children

*c*Convey societal values at the time
*c*Honesty in admitting faults:
*c*Try to improve on one's faults
*c*An alternative way of acting is offered: Listen to constructive criticism and allow a person to choose behaviors (as long as s/he is willing to accept the consequences); be prepared to monitor the choice and intervene if harm will be caused
*s*Good parents;
*s*Are wiser/more knowledgable than their kids
*s*Able to help their kids with homework
*s*Brothers/Sisters don't fight
*s*No fighting/divorce
*t*Children feel loved and cared for by their parents, teachers, peers, community:
*t*Every child's basic needs are met
*t*Physical needs: food, clothing, shelter, sleep
*t*Children nutritional needs are met
*t*Emotional needs: community members are children feel that others are approachable; free to discuss any topic; parents are good listeners/empathetic;
*t*Accepting of children's individuality and able to guide them into respectful thinking/actions

Financial Security

*c*Everyone has reasonable financial security
*c*Providing basic necessities - food, clothing, shelter
*s*Good jobs:
*s*Have fair pay (enough to buy necessities)
*s*Have low stress
*s*Make you think
*s*Learning lots
*s*Everyone entitled to a good retirement:
*s*Enough money to do fun things
*s*Get help from volunteers/grandchildren
*s*Opportunities to contribute to society
*t*Everyone has the opportunity to secure employment that enables him/her to meet and sustain all basic needs:
*t*Everybody has a job that earns money or pursues learning
*t*Job exists for anyone who cannot find work, as long as a person is willing to stay
*t*Low unemployment rate (<4%)

Goal Achievement

*c*Means to obtain the best education possible to achieve career goals
*c*Opportunity to pursue interests through education
*c*Fulfill one's goals/dreams

Personal Health

*c*Enough health care professionals to meet demand
*c*Health promotion programs/education
*c*Adequate facilities
*c*All medical needs are met in a timely/appropriate fashion
*p*Everyone is healthy
*p*High community health standards
*p*Effective health system:
    *p*Equal access regardless of income, location, culture
    *p*Convenient, timely access
    *p*High training standards for practitioners
    *p*Sanction of proven alternative medical treatment
    *p*Health system gives people choices in prevention/treatment plans
*p*Lifestyles that result in health promotion vs. disease prevention are 'the norm':
    *p*e.g., People exercise and 'play' on a regular basis
    *p*e.g., Families exercise and 'play' together
    *p*e.g., Communities exercise and play together
*p*High standards for personal health

Freedom of Thought, Expression

*p*Freedom of expression of ideas/beliefs; e.g., political, spiritual/religion, economic - consistent with fundamental/prevailing values + the law
*p*Without condemning another group/system of beliefs
*p*Independent thinking
*s*Everyone entitled to same human rights:
    *s*No homelessness
    *s*Everyone has food
    *s*Everyone is clothed
    *s*Everyone entitled to a good education
    *s*Proper medical care - not dependent on how much money you have/make
    *s*Ability to participate in consumer society (buy things)
    *s*Privacy
    *s*Right to elect government leaders
    *s*License to drive at 16 years if qualified
    *s*No racism/discrimination
    *s*Everyone entitled to leisure time (time to relax and spend time with family)
    *t*A bill of basic rights that society supports as being inviolate

Hope, Action For A Better World

*p*Activism: making the world a better place for self/others
*p*Opportunities
*p*Encouragement
*p*Hope,empowerment
*p*Experiences: formal and informal
*p*Leadership
*p*Follower
*p*People are enthusiastic about the future:
    *p*A faith that we can all get ahead through cooperation; Belief in and commitment to growth of our society (the world will be better place for all); self-confidence
    *p*Energetic
    *p*A belief in your ability to shape your future
*p*Creativity
*t*Spiritual needs: feel worthwhile (able to contribute); feel secure with your 'place in the world' ; a sense of belonging in the world; a sense of purpose--a sense of order that creates security

Effective Educational Opportunities

*s*Good schools:
    *s*Teachers understand kids
    *s*Teachers listen to what kids want/need
    *s*Kids are safe from harm
    *s*Teachers who help you when you're behind
    *s*Teachers who will challenge you when you're ahead
    *s*Teach kids what they need to know to get a good job
    *s*Kids get along/No name-calling/No stereotyping by appearance
*c*Means to obtain the best education possible to achieve career goals/dreams

Environmental Stewardship

s Clean environment:
    *s*Clean air
    *s*Clean water
    *s*Clean earth
    *s*Safe, healthy wildlife

2. What are the challenges that our children will face in their adult years?

Competition For Limited Resources/Opportunities

*c*Competition for:
- *c*Resources/information
- *c*Positions/Jobs/careers

*t*Creating and sustaining an effective health/educational systems
t workforce supply that is too small to meet the demand
*s*Giving everyone the opportunity for a good education – keeping it affordable, allowing flexibility in schooling to allow everyone to be successful; providing sufficient spaces for everyone who wants to learn
*s*Finding good people to:
- teach
- provide health/education support
- practice medicine
- be tradespersons
- be pilots/flight attendants
- do jobs that require a lot of training/are dangerous

Information Management

*c*Managing incredible volume of information/knowledge:
- *c*Extract what is important to you
- *c*What is true/false/deceiving - being objective in the face of mass media:
  - *c*Advertising/News/Internet advertisers/Election campaigns
- *c*Using it for own purposes:
  - *c*Investments
  - *c*Self-improvement/education
  - *c*Purchasing decisions
  - *c*Service to others
  - *c*Client needs
  - *c*Improve the product/service you sell/offer

Political Activism

c Awareness/consciousness of the political process/democratic ideals
*c*Learn about the issues
*c*Challenge political candidates to explain positions
*c*Exercise your vote

Aging Population

*t*Finding ways of supporting a large retired population who will be using a large amount of society's resources (health, roads) but not contributing in accordance with their use/drain

*s*finding enough workers with so many people retiring
c Caring for an older generation:
    *c*housing/Health care/Sustainable income
    *c*Education/Leisure activities
    *c*Taking responsibility for the elderly family members

Promoting Community Spirit

c Promote a sense of community:
    *c*Provide opportunities for interactions, Promote interdependence
    *c*Volunteerism/community service
    *p*Making social contacts/community involvement

Promoting Personal Well-being

*c*Personal Well-being:
*c*Balance in life between work/leisure/family
*c*Healthy lifestyle
*c*Leisure facilities/programs that are:
    *c*Affordable
    *c*Accessible
*c*Finding a passion and pursuing it
*t*maintain a positive, hopeful attitude (avoid cynicism)
*t*The opportunity to lead a life balancing work, family, personal, community
*t*People living within their means
*t*Not looking for happiness primarily through consumption
*t*Finding a job/career that is inherently enjoyable/fulfilling
*t*Find some other interests to compensate for any shortcomings in the job/career
*t*Having a healthy perspective/balance in life:
*t*Balance ambition and expectations by living within means
*t*Basic needs are fulfilled first/Maintain physical, mental, emotional, spiritual health
*t*Maintaining healthy relationships with partners/family/community
*t*Find the means to learn how to maintain healthy relationships through adversity
*t*Respect the dignity of the other person
*t*Compromise
*t*Consider how others may be affected by your actions
*p*fulfill and find appropriate means to meet spiritual needs

Promoting Creativity

*c*Develop critical thinkers:
*c*Adapting/reacting to change
*c*Taking control of own life/be pro-active

Preparing For The Unknown

*c*To be resilient--Flexibility in thinking/Apply skills/knowledge to new situations, curious, develop the ability to evaluate a situation to find danger/opportunity
*c*Think 'outside the box'--consider what you believe might be wrong or flawed:
- *Envisioning a different/new future/have dreams and see them as achievable
- *Consider new ways of doing things
- *Having the courage and confidence to believe that significant changes can be made; not seeing failure as a negative but as a positive

*c*Consider the possibilities/opportunities available and pursue them
*s*coping with fear from terrorism/crime and its effects
*s*making sure schools are safe places
*t*Find ways to recognize/anticipate the challenges ahead--learn from our past mistakes
*t*Knowing how to deal with new technologies:
- *t*Anticipate moral implications
- *t*Learning new skills and relationships (effects on our lifestyles)
- *t*Anticipate effect of changes on our culture (e.g., employment trends, resource utilization, equitable access, literacy)
- *t*People are not dependent on technology - people can meet their needs without relying on technology
- *t*Realize that 'facts' are based on perceptions and are at best incomplete:
- *t*Maintain a positive, hopeful attitude (avoid cynicism)
- *t*Consider all sides of an issue and to reach one's own conclusions on the basis of careful and rational thought

Promoting Human Rights

*c*Maintain own identity but be tolerant of those who are different
*t*Avoid overreacting to problems to the point of justifying violence/suspension of rights

Developing and Maintaining Positive Relationships

*sp*Find the right partner:
- *p*Makes them happy
- *p*Respects their independence
- *p*Supports them in their interests, goals, needs
- *p*Be there for them when things get rough
- *p*Willing to compromise his/her own needs/desires
- *p*Care for or be considerate to others

*t*Find new ways to nurture and to ensure respectful interactions among people
*s*Finding a partner who is respectful, understanding, independent, mature, reliable, not demanding or controlling

Promoting Good Family Life

*s*Protecting kids from drugs/alcohol
*s*Making sure that your kids do well in school
*s*Parents being a good model for kids
*s*Staying out of debt; no gambling

Acquiring Financial Security/Independence

*p*Choosing a career that lets them do what they like, not just because of the pay/prestige
*p*Exercising one's power/influence in making the world a better place
*p*Resist and respond appropriately to the temptations/dangers in the world
*p*Becoming independent:
    *p*Realizing that appearance is not a basis for judging people
    *p*Being aware of responsibilities to others
    *p*Keeping track and fulfilling your commitments
    *p*Having to solve your own problems--looking for help
    *p*Knowing how to respond when you're ill
    *p*Making your own decisions and justifying them to others
    *p*Dealing with possible changes in the relationship with parents - Leaving old friends and making new ones
*s*Getting a good job:
    enough salary to provide for a family
    low stress, enjoyable, makes you think
    equitable pay (for equal work)
*s*Living on my own/Providing for my basic needs: food, clothing, shelter. transportation
*s*Knowing when to see a doctor
*s*Staying out of debt and paying my bills:
*s*Knowing how to spend wisely:
    *s*Making wise decisions about how I spend my money - not wasting on unnecessary things
    *s*Ensuring that you buy what you NEED
    *s*When to spend, when to save
*s*Leaving my parents/family - gaining my parents' trust that I can make it on my own
*s*Making tough decisions re: drugs, smoking, getting married, having children, moving to find work
*s*Consequences of saying 'no' to temptation (pressure to do wrong):
    *s*Might get beat up or you or your family threatened with harm, physical, mental, emotional abuse
*s*Having to move away from family and friends
*s*Taking care of my things
*s*Being alone at times and not always having someone to depend on
*s*Finding a job that pays well, is secure, I like, maintains my current lifestyle, allows me to be home nightly, provides a good life for my family
*s*Getting a good education
*s*Raising my children to be good people and to make the right decisions

*s*Be able to handle the unpredictable:
    *s*Staying away from risky situations
    *s*Acting maturely: Taking responsibility for my actions
*p*Realizing that appearance is not a basis for judging people
*p*Being aware of responsibility to others—keeping track of and fulfilling your commitments
*p*Having to solve your own problems—looking for help
*p*Knowing how to respond when you're ill
*p*Making your own decisions and justifying them to others
*p*Dealing with possible changes in the relationship with parents
*p*Leaving old friends and making new ones

Protecting The Environment

*t*Develop renewable and alternative resources
*s*Keeping the environment safe, healthy/clean, sustained

3. What Are The Roles Our Children will have to fulfill as adults? What are the KSA's children will need to acquire in order to successfully fulfill these roles?

CpstSuccessful Family Life

pstRelationships:
    pCommunication (across generations)
    sCommunicate openly, honestly, politely, clearly
    tBe a good listener/communicator
    pBe empathy/ patience/flexibility
    tBe empathetic (put yourself in other's place) and objective at times
    tBe caring, loving, honest, resourceful, wise
    tBe responsible
    sMake the time to be with them
    sBe honest and open in your discussions
    sProvide your children with opportunities to grow/learn and set priorities
    sTeach your children how to be good persons
    sInvolve your family in decision-making
    tBe able to make snap decisions

pstEffective Disciplinarian

sKnow how to punish for wrongs to ensure that they don't happen again
sTrust your children will make the right decisions
sBe willing to listen to their side of the story before making a decision
pDiscipline fairly (persistence, consistency, fairness)
sTrust your children will make the right decisions

sBalance between strictness and easygoing--know where to draw the line
sKnow how to punish for wrongs to ensure that they don't happen again
sChange your personality to suit the situation (strict, nice)
sBe able to handle your stress so that you don't overreact
sBe a counselor to children:
    sBe a good listener
    sBe patient and listen
sForgive for (but not necessarily forget) past mistakes
sBe courageous to do what is right
sDon't be afraid to discipline
sDon't take your frustrations/anger out on others
sHave alternative ways to deal with your stress
sBe able to share your frustrations with others to find solutions
sMake rules and enforce them
sPractice self-control
tForgive

pEffective Role-Model/Leader (by example)

sPractice what you preach (do what you expect others to)
tGive of yourself first
sCarry through on promises and duties
psSet priorities: make time to spend with family/friends
tBe able to juggle a number of roles/time/commitments/work + family + friends
sMake the time and provide the opportunity for your family members to share
sKeep promises made to do things together
tTake care of yourself FIRST (without being selfish)
pBe organized
tBe energetic; keep up your health
tPersevere in fulfilling duties
tHave a good moral foundation/ethics
tBe courageous in facing adversity/don't fall apart
tBe resilient - be able to 'bounce back'
tHave a strong sense of self-esteem
sEnsure that children know the extended family

cpstSuccessful Breadwinner

cprovide adequate, stable income/sBe trained to find and keep a job
cstBe able to provide the basic needs to children: earning money to feed, house, clothe family
sProvide transportation/Make enough money to purchase vehicles/Be able to drive (safely) and be available to drive other when needed
sKnow how to cook good meals, keep clean home
sHave experience in using the skills needed for the job

sBudget your money to ensure that you don't go bankrupt and the family have NEEDS met
sKeep work and family separate/Find a job with reasonable hours/avoid late/weekend meetings

sMaking Education A Priority:

sHelp children with schooling: make the time to help them
sGet to know what the school is teaching and expecting
sRemember some things that you learned in school
sBe able and prepared to learn new ideas WITH your children
sBe patient; have more than one way to explain things
sAvoid disrupting children's schooling

sLoving Relationship With Partner

sDeal appropriately with mistakes your spouse may be making

pcCaregiver (family, animals)

pCommunicate empathetically
    pFind out what is wrong and treat it
    pSet priorities on time, money
    pBe patience
    pBe organized

pcsParticipant In the Economy (Employer/Employee/Entrepreneur)

psCommunicate effectively
pPractice time-management:
    pOrganize your work, thoughts, life
    pSet and keep priorities/goals (developing balanced life)
pKnow yourself (strengths, weaknesses, purpose)
pWork on a team/have cooperative/social skills
pDevelop self-discipline (stay focused)
pVisualize the 'end/desired future'
cBe innovative/Creative Person
cLearn
sUse numbers/math
sThink and solve problems
sBe adaptable, flexible, willing to share/give up power
sBe able/have the willpower to make tough decision/sticking to one's principles
sBe confident in your ability and actions
sLearn new skills and change as needed
sBe able to work on a team, even with those you may not like
    sGive others the opportunity to provide say in decisions

tBe responsible and accountable for your actions/duties
tBe a lifelong learner
tKnow your responsibilities/what others expect of you, and what you are accountable for
tBe assertive, creative, industrious, punctual, honest
tBe a calculated risk-taker
tHave people skills
ctLearn to work on a team/with a group or organization
cLearn to be a leader/follower/administrator/supporter/producer/communicator innovator/creative person/learner

tConsumer

tConsider the effects of the manufacturing process on the environment
tBe able and willing to compare /contrast products
tBe willing to and know where to research the available products/services
tEvaluate/differenciate among choices
tLive within your means
tBudget/set priorities on expenses (wants vs. needs)
tTake the time to make decisions
sDon't steal: be honest
sConsider your needs vs. wants
sShop around for best value (price/quality)
sSave some money/put off expenses until you have enough
sSet priorities—avoid credit/debt or unmanageable loans
sEarn your money—don't borrow or beg for it

pstTeacher/Role-model

pCommunicate; simplify complicated ideas
pMotivate/inspire others
p'Practice what you preach'
pPractice self-discipline (modeling the desired behaviors/attitudes)
pPractice patience/Empathy
pVisualize the 'end result' /the desired future
tBe responsible
tHave a sense of direction
tPractice what you preach
tBe honest, trustworthy
tCommunicate/Listen
tBe credible based on your past actions/relationships
tBe unselfish
pPractice diplomacy skills - sensitive to other perspectives/people's feelings
pBe aware of the how people think about an issue at the time
sKnow what is right vs. wrong
sEmpathize (put yourself in others' place)
sMake good decisions

tConsider all sides of an issue and reach your own conclusions on the basis of careful and rational thought
tAvoid over-reacting to problems, to the point of justifying violence or a suspension of rights

pstVolunteer

pPractice time management /Dependability (be on time)
pHave good social skills (getting along)
pKnow when to lead/when to follow
pKnow your purpose/commitment
tFind the time to volunteer
tBe responsible in fulfilling expectations
tChoose your cause in relation to your interests, resources, ethics
tMake your volunteerism a priority in life
tBe unselfish
tBe a lifelong learner to acquire new skills and attitudes
sBe kind, unselfish, patient
sBe flexible to take on various responsibilities
sBe dependable—do what/he where you're supposed to
sDon't worry about what you're going to get out of volunteering

cpstCitizen/Neighbour/Community Member

pBe 'outgoing'
pBe reliable/dependable
pcBe organized (Take care of your/public property)
pBe empathetic (consider how others feel/see) -- know how your actions impact others
pFind the time to volunteer
cPractice environmental stewardship
cBe informed of the issues community faces
cPay taxes
sMake time to do volunteer work
sAct wisely when something is wrong
spcKnow/Follow the laws (driving, not stealing, being a good neighbour)
sKeep your property in good condition
tKnow and fulfill your responsibilities
tKnow and follow the laws
tHave an ethical/moral compass
tConduct yourself in a safe and caring way
tBe concerned for the welfare of others
tBe assertive in your convictions; speak out on community issues
tcspTake part in the political process and make educated decisions
tIdentify what has to be done, and do it

pGet involved--know where/how
cGet involved--know where/how
cPractice environmental stewardship

psLeader (family, community, at work)

pAccept everyone regardless of their culture/race/lifestyle
pInspire people to follow
pBe a good listener
pInspire followers to feel that they are part of something/inclusive
pBe willing to act on decisions
pBe assertive-self-confident/persuasive
pConsult others/don't assume to have all the answers
pLet others take the limelight/credit/leadership role
pHave passion/conviction for what you are striving for/believing in the rightness of what you do/how you do it
pDelegate responsibility/facilitator role/know when to 'pull back'
pBe a positive role-model
pBe able to separate the leadership role from one's personal life/esteem
pKnow and admit to your weaknesses
pKnow and use your strengths
sBe on friendly terms with your neighbours—welcome new ones (help them learn/get around)
sRespect others' differences/privacy/space/property
sTake care of your own place
sBe watchful for the neighbourhood's safety/well-being
sShare your tools and cooperate in sharing responsibilities (e.g., maintaining the fence between your properties)
sInclude neighbours in activities (when appropriate)

pcSurvivor (cook, fix things, clean, maintain finances)

pProblem-solve/think through a problem
pBe observant/aware/notice things
pPlan ahead/anticipate problems
pKnow when, where, and how to get help/advice
pBudgeting/what credit is and involves
pBe willing to ask for help
pKnow about nutrition and cost of food
cMake decisions
cSet priorities
cMaintain good health
cBe a self-motivator/initiator

pstFriend/Partner/Psychologist (Empathizer)

cBe a good listener/counselor/helper/supporter; tBe a good listener/communicator
tBeLoyal, generous/Unselfish
tForgive, care, Be honest (most of the time), sTrust others
tBe empathetic, supportive, sympathetic (at times),
sBe considerate of others' ideas/feelings
tMake time
sCompromise—be willing to be flexible, not always try to get your own way
sBe a good listener—paying attention, taking the time, letting the other person share
sDon't try to control the other person's life (e.g., let them have their own friends
sMake it a priority to spend time with your friends
sEncourage/support others with their efforts
sDon't feel a need to compete with your friends
sRespect your friends' privacy/space; Let your friends be themselves; tolerate their differences
sHave a healthy perspective/balance in life

pDoctor (nursing self/others/pets)

p Have diagnostic skills
pBe observant
pBe compassionate/sensitive to people's difficulties/illnesses

pcsFamily member (sibling, child, in-law)

sBe and have fun
sStay in contact with siblings/family
sBe patient (don't overreact)
sBe considerate of the age differences of relatives—take part in activities with them, even if
you don't like them
sSet a good example

pMember of a church

pAccept some religious doctrine
p Practice self-sacrifice

cLearner

cBe able to get information
cBe able to stay informed
tKnow your strengths/weaknesses and be willing to expand your abilities/knowledge
tBe ambitious
tBe confident in ability to learn

tAppreciate the fact that learning never stops
tKnow your learning style
tBe adaptable, creative
tBe a risk-taker
tBe inquisitive/imaginative

tAdvocate - Stand up for something/somebody:

tBe courageous in maybe going against the 'main stream'
tBe assertive/communicate effectively
tBe empathetic
tListen/Consider others' opinions/perspectives
tKnowing how to effectively get results
tKnow + choose the most appropriate/effective means

4. What are the challenges that children face today?

Perspective On/Balance In Life

pLiving in a world in which they may not be trusted, heard, understood
cGaining a perspective on one's life and future
pLearn to be satisfied with what one has
pSort and establish priorities (work, family, recreation, friends, spirituality)
sDeciding whether or not to work part-time while in school
pMake decisions in relation to tastes, values, parental expectations
cSetting short and long term goals
cChoosing an appropriate lifestyle:
    Based on one's value/moral system
    Learning to live within one's means
    Seeing a link between lifestyle and goals
    Learning to avoid high-risk behaviors
    Learning to evaluate risk
    Learning to say 'no'
pMaking age-appropriate decisions

Becoming Independent of Parents

cLearning time-management:
    Finding balance in one's life
    Setting priorities
    Living according to one's principles/morals/values
cLearning how to spend money wisely:
    Living within one's means
    Practicing self-discipline – being willing and able to forego immediate gratification
    Adjusting one's lifestyle according to one's means

Assessing the true 'worth' of what one buys (needs vs. desires)
cLearning how to earn money – know the options available, qualifications for jobs (that you desire, enjoy, and will fulfill goals)
pEarning and achieving independence (fulfilling responsibilities related to home/school /community
p(Eventually)Living without parental supervision/guidance
pFacing new experiences/obstacles that they may not be comfortable about
psBalancing time/energy to do school work, lessons, sports, TV, computer, games
cEarning extra income to assist with expenses: balancing work time with other responsibilities
cLearning the consequences of one's actions before a crisis arises
cDeveloping a sense of self-confidence, self-satisfaction
cLearning to forgive
cFinding one's own 'path in life', becoming independent and deciding when to 'break loose':
Knowing what opportunities are available
Persisting in pursuing goals
Learning to take responsibility and be accountable for the results of one's actions
Finding the time and energy to provide those opportunities for independence
Being able and willing to take risks

Protecting Onself

pDeveloping a sense of security/safety
pDealing with risks/threats in the world
sDealing with fears (of assault, bombs, shootings)
sDealing with bullies (verbal and physical assaults)
staking care of your things so they don't get stolen

Education/Career Planning

pFulfilling school expectations
cTaking advantage of the opportunities that education can provide
cDeveloping literacy/numeracy skills (read, write, communicate, do math/compute)
pConsider/choose a career/post-secondary education
cBecoming a lifelong learner—learning to cook, do laundry, do finances, make healthy choices, dealing with emergencies; being able to find help and knowing when to seek it
cPlanning for a career in an uncertain world:
Learn about career choices and prerequisites
Cope with/Thrive in an environment of constant change/uncertainty (embrace change)
cDeveloping skills in interviewing, completing applications, writing a resume,'selling yourself'
sDoing well in school:
Being persistent when in need of help
Getting homework done

Dealing with short-tempered teachers
Increasing expectations in high school means harder work
Fear of teachers going on strike
Choosing the right courses for your career/post-secondary education
Deciding on a career path

Maintaining Good Health

cBeing aware of the risks to health and the need to maintain it
cLearning what a healthy lifestyle is and fulfill it:
Being aware of your own health
Making personal health a priority
sStaying away from drugs/smoking

Family Responsibilities

cTo face a non-traditional family environment:
Not having the opportunity to spend as much time with parents as one wishes and managing their time to create the opportunity (by setting priorities on time)
cAssuming the traditional role of a parent with siblings/or disabled family members

Finding Time To Relax/Have Fun

cFinding the opportunity to participate in recreational activities:
cLearning time management
cBeing aware of the opportunities
cSetting an example for own children
cFinding the means to afford
cTaking the initiative, overcoming the lack of motivation
cFinding a partner with whom to participate
cSupporting community initiatives to build facilities

Coping With The Information Explosion

pBeing a kid while subjected to adult issues/media
pMaking sense of the information faced
cSorting through all the media messages (separating truth/lies, important/trivial)
cFinding multiple sources of information
cInforming oneself on the issues
cBecoming educated on the biases in the media – learning to think for oneself (developing an openness/curiosity to learn more and to realize one may/can not know it all)
cFind ways/means to get guidance in decision-making: choosing appropriate sources of advice/support, developing research skills, knowing the difference between right and wrong/true and false

cMaking choices on accurate information

Developing Healthy Relationships

pMake and keep relationships (friends)
cRespecting everyone for their views, realizing that they may know something you don't, taking the time to assist/support others in need, being willing to give/take advice, being tolerant (willing to accept/respect the views of others)
cLearning to and take the time to truly listen to others—suspending your own ideas and listening carefully to others
cMaking and keeping friends and feeling that one belongs to a

Community

cFinding the opportunities to be exposed to other cultures/generations to expand one's perspective through one-on-one dialogue
cMaking wise decisions regarding friends:
- Being truthful, open, and sincere in communication
- Knowing your value/moral system
- Developing self-confidence to live according to your morals/values
- Sharing interests and making sacrifices
- Learning to 'read' and understand people

sBalancing between the expectations of friends/parents/teachers
sBeing yourself and risk not being popular; not worrying about how others think of you:
- Wearing what you want
- Being mild-mannered, friendly kind
- Not worrying about how you look
- Making and keeping friends
- Not giving in to what your friends expect; e. g. taking the same options, skipping school
- Respecting others' rights without holding something against them
- Finding friends that want to have fun without drugs/alcohol

sGetting along with brothers/sisters/parents

Appendix K

Vision Statements On a Desirable Future For Our Children

The Project participants created the following statements collectively, during the second focus group session, as a basis for further reflection and dialogue on the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA's) that they believed that children need to acquire in order to create this "vision of a desirable future."

What would a desirable future for our children look like?

In a peaceful world community, everyone would be safe, be protected and have a sense of fairness. People would treat others with kindness, caring, and respect. People would have a strong desire and ability to communicate.

Family members would be stable and supportive of each other by ensuring that all members feel loved, cared for, and a sense of belonging. The family would accept and understand children's individuality and would guide them to respectful thinking and actions.

Everyone--children, parents, educators and the community--would be responsible for doing one's best and working together for the education of all people, so that everyone can be successful in his/her life.

Everyone would have the opportunity and would take responsibility to gain the skills to make a living (meeting basic needs) while doing something good for others and giving something good back to the community. Everyone's basic needs of life would be met.

Every person would take care of him/herself and then, when necessary, have access to good medical services.

Everyone would be allowed to speak his/her beliefs and feelings as long as he/she doesn't hurt others in doing so. Everyone would have the right to be treated fairly and would have the responsibility to treat others fairly.

Everyone would have the opportunity to reach for his/her goals and dreams. People would have hope and faith for a better world and would work to make it happen. Everyone would be responsible for keeping our environment clean and healthy.

Appendix L

The Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KSA's) of Success

Attitudes	Knowledge/Skills
A. Flexible/Adaptable *Aware* *Observant* *Analytical* *Intuitive* *Perceptive*	*Able to compromise/negotiate *Able to set priorities and act accordingly *Able to learn new knowledge and skills to meet new challenges *Able to anticipate and assess situations (challenges, opportunities, risks) *Able to set priorities *Able to think critically *Able to handle crises
B. Caring for/considerate of others *Empathetic/Compassionate* *Unselfish* *Seek out opportunities to assist others* *Appreciate the worth and dignity of every person* *Respect the environment* *Committed to making the world a better place for everyone (volunteer)*	*Able to find/take time for friends and family *Able to be punctual *Able to manage one's time and energy to fulfill one's responsibilities (dependability) *Able to respect others for their perspective/wisdom and truly listen *Able to find and undertake opportunities to contribute to the community *Able to be patient in allowing someone to explain their actions before reacting *Able to consider the effects of your actions on others before acting and be considerate of others *Able to help others without expecting reward or recognition *Able to act safely and 'look out' after others

C. Ambitious, self-motivated, resourceful & industrious *Organized* *Calculated risk-taking*	*Able to take initiative--act without having to be asked or forced (be proactive) *Able to determine when one has to act on one's own *Able to find/seek opportunities to succeed *Able to set and work to achieve short-term and long-term goals yet be flexible *Able to set and meet high but realistic expectations of oneself *Able to manage time *Able to seek out wise, well-intentioned people as mentors
D. Communicative *Openly* *Honestly* *Sincerely* *Patiently* *Clearly*	*Able to listen with an open, clear mind and seek to understand before being understood (dialogue skills) *Able to wait for others to explain their ideas /thoughts *Able to share your thoughts and feelings in appropriate manner *Able to motivate/inspire others
E. Responsible & Accountable *Be courageous in acting ethically* *Self-disciplined* *Independent* *Honest* *Dependable*	*Able to explain one's actions and face their consequences honestly and openly *Able to make thoughtful and considerate decisions on basis of morals, values, convictions *Able to stay organized and manage one's time *Able to take care of oneself *Able to look after one's possessions/property *Able to set one's own direction in life and not just conform *Able to tell the truth and account for one's actions *Able to fulfill responsibilities and commitments
F. Perseverant/Passionate (care deeply about something)	*Able to stay focused and determined in pursuing goals, despite setbacks and undesirable situations *Fulfill responsibilities and expectations of others *Able to find satisfaction/fulfillment in pursuing a goal/interest
G. Resilient *Positive* *Optimistic/Hopeful*	*Able to 'bounce back' from failure/tragedy *Able to respond appropriately to adversity/stress (control emotions) *Able to cope with change and uncertainty *Able to remain focused on what's important and good

H. Confident (Have strong self-esteem) *Assertive* *Credible* *Humble* *Realistic*	*Able to handle challenges *Able to take 'calculated' risks *Able to be persuasiveness *Able to stand up for oneself/what is right *Able to act according to one's values/principles and not give in to what's 'popular' *Able to assess own strengths and weaknesses objectively and know your capabilities *Able to accept failure--your own and others'-- as a lesson *Able to take some control over one's life/future
I. Democratic *Let others have their way/say* *Respect the rights and welfare of others above self* *Citizenship*	*Able to compromise by making sacrifices for the sake of others *Able to cooperate; work on a team *Able to use the legal means to make changes to 'the system' *Able to treat others as you would want to be treated (fairly) *Able to give time for others to provide input into decisions *Able to resolve conflicts so that everyone 'wins' *Able to exercise your civil rights/fulfill responsibilities
J. Creative, curious, innovative, imaginative	*Able to see things differently and to 'think outside the box' *Able to adapt others' ideas to new situations *Able to adjust one's thinking/perception when encountering new situations
K. Sensible economically *Appreciative of what you have* *Budget your resources and money*	*Able to live within means *Able to seek good value *Able to set priorities on spending (financial planning) *Able for forego gratification and focus on priorities *Able to provide a stable lifestyle in meeting needs *Able to plan for the future (e.g., retirement)
L. Reflective *Seek first to under stand, then to be understood* *Seek knowledge* *Be open-minded receptive to new perspectives/ideas*	*Able to envision a desirable future and perceive the ways to achieve it *Able to live a 'balanced' life (focusing on priorities) *Able to 'suspend' one's beliefs and convictions in order to give full consideration to new ideas/perspectives *Able to assess situations objectively *Able to identify one's prejudices, values, motives and the link between human nature and behavior (esp. in others)

Establish priorities in life and keep the 'end' in mind	*Able to appreciate that one's understanding/knowledge is limited, incomplete, or flawed *Able to re-evaluate/challenge one's beliefs, values, principles *Able to question conventional 'wisdom' or knowledge
M. Tolerant *Humble* *Forgiving* *Believe that everyone has worth and has something to teach/contribute* *Believe that everyone has as much right as you do to live as they desire*	*Able to let others 'be themselves' without prejudging/discrimination *Able to forgive others for their mistakes *Able to adapt to new cultures *Able to accommodate others' dreams and desires with your own *Able to take the time to listen and truly understand others' perspectives *Able to set a good example *Able to seek advice/help, knowing that one could be 'wrong' and not 'know it all' *Able to 'practice what one preaches' *Able to treat others respectfully, regardless of their mistakes *Able to 'live and let live' *Able to give people the 'benefit of the doubt' until they prove unworthy of your trust
N. Lifelong learners *Seek knowledge, understanding, enlightenment (new perspectives)* *Critical thinking (test your assumptions)*	*Able to learn new skills and knowledge as needed, and to develop one's talents and to expand one's perspective *Able to take advantage of new learning situations *Able to find accuracy and truth in information explosion *Able to find objective, balanced information *Able to learn from others' experiences
O. Committed to personal health *Self-disciplined* *Safety-conscious* *Considerate of your value to others*	*Able to look after yourself (maintain fitness and good nutrition) *Able to determine when to seek medical advice *Able to fulfill your responsibilities *Able to assess the risk to health/life (vulnerabilities) *Able to avoid potentially injurious situations (preventive health)